



Greece and Crete 1941

COMBAT

New Zealand Infantryman **VERSUS** German Motorcycle Soldier

David Greentree



Greece and Crete 1941

COMBAT New Zealand Infantryman
VERSUS
German Motorcycle Soldier

David Greentree



Illustrated by Adam Hook

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE OPPOSING SIDES

Origins and doctrine

Recruitment, logistics and morale

Weaponry, training and tactics

Command, control and communications

SERVIA

14–15 April 1941

PLATAMON

15–16 April 1941

STILOS TO SFAKIA

27–30 May 1941

ANALYSIS

AFTERMATH

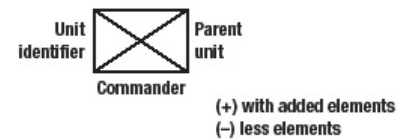
UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Key to military symbols

Army Group	Army	Corps	Division	Brigade	Regiment	Battalion
Company/Battery	Platoon	Section	Squad	Infantry	Artillery	Cavalry
Airborne	Unit HQ	Air defence	Air Force	Air mobile	Air transportable	Amphibious
Anti-tank	Armour	Air aviation	Bridging	Engineer	Headquarters	Maintenance
Medical	Missile	Mountain	Navy	Nuclear, biological, chemical	Ordnance	Parachute
Reconnaissance	Signal	Supply	Transport movement	Fortress or static	Fortress machine gun	

Key to unit identification



Introduction

Escape was on Capt Rangi Royal's mind as he led his men down from the Cretan hills to the Mesopotamos Valley and the village of Armenoi. In the early hours of 28 May 1941 he was told to hold up the German advance guard with two companies from 28 (Māori) Bn in order that the main body of Allied troops could make their way across the White Mountains to the southern shore where evacuation awaited. By midday, with his positions covering the main road bypassed on both sides, he had decided to evade his pursuers across country and entered Armenoi with three men equipped with .45in Thompson submachine guns either side of him in arrowhead formation. With the Germans having airlifted *Kradschützen* (motorcycle troops) to Crete, an encounter with the enemy could happen at any time.

Recently, retreat was something with which the New Zealanders were all too familiar. In April 1941, the campaign on mainland Greece was a fighting retreat from the start; a risky military adventure where all that could be done was to delay rather than stop the German advance. Maj-Gen Bernard Freyberg, GOC 2nd NZ Division, summed it up as 'a disaster ... embarked upon for political reasons' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 556). From the start Freyberg was not enthusiastic, but on 17 February 1941 was bamboozled by the C-in-C Middle East, Field Marshal Archibald Wavell, who mistakenly told him the New Zealand Government had agreed to intervention. Only on 26 February, following the official British offer of military forces to Greece, was the New Zealand Government asked; they gave their assent three hours later without asking for Freyberg's advice. True, Freyberg had not made his worries clear to Peter Fraser, the New Zealand Prime Minister, who instructed him in future to 'report at once any disagreement as to the operational employment of the New Zealand forces in future' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 567), but by 9 March, fortified with Freyberg's opinion, Fraser – though he thought pulling out 'would destroy the moral basis of our cause' – was calling the campaign 'dangerous and speculative' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 560). The decision to hold on to Crete was for many similarly misplaced and again threatened the annihilation of New Zealand's only division.



In Egypt prior to deployment to Greece, 2nd NZ Division never completed a divisional exercise because 5 NZ Bde – with the majority of the division's equipment – only arrived from Britain in March 1941, when 4 NZ Bde was already on its way to Greece. 4 NZ Bde was the first to deploy, to the Aliakmon River. The New Zealanders benefited from the railway line north from Athens and, following arrival at Piraeus harbour, were soon sent further north through the mountains. Here, in March 1941 a column of New Zealand soldiers marches through Katerini, situated on the plain north of Mount Olympus. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-00988-F)

In April 1939, Britain and France had guaranteed military support for Greece if it was attacked by a foreign power. When Italy invaded Greece in October 1940, Greece did not ask for help from Britain, and Britain deployed

only aircraft to Greek airbases. At first, Secretary of State for War Anthony Eden did not want any troops sent there from North Africa as in December 1940 a successful British offensive was under way, but following his appointment as Foreign Secretary Eden changed his mind and wrote of 'seriously upsetting the German plans' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 143). By mid-January 1941, mainly at Prime Minister Winston Churchill's instigation, the policy changed; the aim now was to set up a Balkan front against the Axis including Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey. C-in-C Middle East, Field Marshal Archibald Wavell visited Athens and offered three divisions to defend Salonika. Wavell, who would always claim there was a reasonable chance of holding a potential German invasion force, did nothing to dissuade Eden and Lt-Gen Henry Maitland 'Jumbo' Wilson, chosen to command the expedition, thought the Greek mountains would negate German armoured strength and believed in the superiority of Allied infantry.

The Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas said three divisions would not be enough to protect Greece (he wanted nine), but would be sufficient to provoke a German invasion. Only if Germany entered Bulgaria would the offer be accepted. In late February 1941, intelligence suggested that this would occur and Wavell and Eden were in Athens for talks on 22 February with the Greek Prime Minister Alexandros Koryzis (Metaxas had died on 29 January). On 7 March they informed the British War Cabinet that if Yugoslavia stayed neutral, a position west of Salonika called the Vermion–Olympus Line could be defended. The first troops were sent to Greece that day; if the Germans were allowed to move through Yugoslavia, however, this position could easily be turned through the Monastir Gap.

2nd NZ Division was the first to land. Lt-Gen Wilson, chosen to command the expedition, issued orders to support the four Greek divisions on the Doiran–Nestos Line in Thrace, and 4 NZ Bde and 6 NZ Bde began to dig an anti-tank ditch north of the rail junction at Katerini that supplied the Greeks in Albania. Freyberg thought this forward deployment on the plain 'violates every principle of military strategy' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 69). 6th Australian Division then started to arrive, with 16 Aust Bde on 21 March and 19 Aust Bde on 3 April, but 17 Aust Bde was late. The British Chiefs of Staff stated they had 'a reasonable chance of holding [the] German attack, thereby encouraging Turks and Yugoslavia to resist' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 143). With a coup in Belgrade having overthrown the pro-Axis government on 27 March, Churchill was under the impression that 'the prize has increased and the risks have somewhat lessened' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 128).



2. Panzer-Division included Kradschützen-Bataillon 2; its approach through Bulgaria in March 1941 proved tiring, with a poor road and railway network creating delays. The German invasion of Greece in April 1941 would be led by the *Kradschützen* (motorcycle troops). When the advance was halted, it was their role to work forward to indicate the enemy's presence for follow-on infantry and expose the position of enemy anti-tank guns before tanks were committed. Here, a sidecar passes a donkey and cart on a mountain road. (Author's Collection)

In September 1940 German troops had started to deploy to secure the oilfields at Ploesti in Romania, and Germany wanted stability in the Balkans to guarantee their security. Hitler, with the invasion of the Soviet Union on his mind, misunderstood the threat British airbases in Greece presented to the oilfields, and on 12 November 1940 issued Führer Directive 18 to prepare for an occupation of Greece north of the Aegean. This was delayed by bad weather and poor roads, which stopped Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm List's 12. Armee from entering Bulgaria until 2 March. On 17 March the steady Allied build-up led Hitler to expand his war aims to include the occupation of the Greek mainland. The Belgrade coup prompted him to include the occupation of Yugoslavia as well. 1. Panzergruppe and XXXXI. Armeekorps (mot.) were

removed from 12. Armee to move on Belgrade; however, General der Kavallerie Georg Stumme's XXXX. Armeekorps (mot.) – comprised of 9. Panzer-Division, the SS formation *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* and 73. Infanterie-Division – was retained to move through the Monastir Gap, as was General der Infanterie Franz von Böhme's XVIII. Gebirgskorps (2. Panzer-Division, 5. and 6. Gebirgs-Divisionen and 72. Infanterie-Division) to advance through the Strumitsa Valley and break through the Doiran–Nestos Line to capture Salonika before moving on to Katerini.

All roads south from the mountains of northern Greece went through Larissa. The main road from Yugoslavia wound its way through the Monastir Gap and on to Kozani before crossing the mountains south of the Aliakmon River at the Stena Portas Pass near Servia. In the east a track went from Katerini and then through the Olympus Pass on the western side of Mount Olympus; and on the eastern side, a railway line by which a trail also ran, went from Katerini via the Platamon Tunnel to the Pinios River. The Germans attempted to force all three routes. Larissa offered the only supply route from Athens and Allied supply dumps were established around the town.

In 1940 the German Panzer divisions had reigned supreme in Europe, but following their strategic deployment in Yugoslavia to turn Greek defensive lines near the Bulgarian border in early April 1941 the terrain would indeed hamper their deployment en masse on a wide front; approach routes were predictable and demolitions could be effective. Despite these defensive advantages, Wilson almost without exception would not order any force to fight a battle without orders to withdraw. As a result the majority of battles would invariably be with outnumbered German advance guards led by ambitious officers that were still capable of infiltrating and surprising the defenders. Maj-Gen Sir Iven Giffard Mackay, whose 6th Australian Division was sent with the New Zealanders, would describe the Germans as 'pushing on without warning, infiltrating here and outflanking there' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 575). *Kradschützen* were the primary practitioners of these tactics.

Greece and Crete, 1941



MAP KEY

1 6 April: The invasion starts. 9. Panzer-Division (XXXX. Armeekorps (mot.)) is soon moving through Macedonia heading for the Monastir Gap and 2. Panzer-Division (XVIII. Gebirgskorps) is pushing into the Strumitsa Valley.

2 9 April: 4 NZ Bde redeploys from the plains north of Katerini to Servia.

3 10 April: Following a successful attack by *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* at Vevi, east of Florina, Oberst Theodor von Sponeck, the commander of Schützen-Regiment 11, is ordered to pursue towards Servia.

4 13 April: Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 (9. Panzer-Division) encounters 1st Rangers and elements from 1 Armd Bde at Ptolemais.

5 Early morning, 15 April: Kampfgruppe *Sponeck* attacks 19 NZ Bn and 18 NZ Bn at Servia Pass; the German force is repulsed.

6 1000hrs, 15 April: Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 (Kampfgruppe *Balck*) attacks 21 NZ Bn positions at Platamon. The *Kradschützen* (motorcycle troops) are repulsed. With the arrival of I./PzRgt 3 (2. Panzer-Division), the Germans make another attack at 1800hrs. The attack is again held by the New Zealanders and along with I./SR 304 (2. Panzer-Division), the *Kradschützen* move further inland to Pandeimon to outflank the Allied defences.

7 16 April: 21 NZ Bn is forced to retreat and occupies positions on the southern bank of the Pinios River.

8 17 April: Aufklärungs-Abteilung 112 (6. Gebirgs-Division) pursues the New Zealanders and, along with elements of Kampfgruppe *Balck*, successfully forces 21 NZ Bn to retreat from the Pinios.

9 17 April: Kradschützen-Bataillon 55 (5. Panzer-Division) moves around Servia to Grevena and starts the pursuit to the Thermopylae Line.

10 25 April: 5 NZ Bde embarks for evacuation at Porto Rafti, with 4 NZ Bde following late on 27 April; both are landed on Crete.

11 27 April: Led by its reconnaissance forces, 2. Panzer-Division enters Athens.

12 28 April: Forced into the Peloponnese, 6 NZ Bde is embarked at Monemvasia, heading for Egypt.

13 20 May: The German airborne landing on Crete commences. On 21 May Maleme airfield is captured; during the following days, 5. and 6. Gebirgs-Divisionen are landed by Ju 52/3m transport aircraft to reinforce the airborne troops.

The Opposing Sides

ORIGINS AND DOCTRINE

New Zealand

Following World War I, New Zealand initially maintained a division-sized territorial military force through compulsory military training. In 1930, the Defence Act made service voluntary and in 1937 maximum authorized strength was only 6,000 (Howard Kippenberger – a lieutenant-colonel and CO 20 NZ Bn in 1939 – claimed it was more like 3,000). In the following year, four colonels (including Neil Lloyd Macky, the future CO 21 NZ Bn) protested about government claims that expansion into a division in wartime was achievable and were placed on the retired list. By 1939, with war on the horizon, there was some improvement, with 778 officers and 9,586 soldiers on the Territorial Army (TA) active list, but only 4,731 were infantry, and the permanent regular staff comprised only 76 officers and 134 other ranks.

In 1939 the New Zealand Government decided to retain the TA for home defence (formed into 1st NZ Division with 1 NZ Bde, 2 NZ Bde and 3 NZ Bde) and raise a separate force for overseas service: 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2 NZEF), comprising 4 NZ Bde, 5 NZ Bde and 6 NZ Bde, each with three battalions. Because of a lack of equipment and facilities, each of the new brigades was raised as a successive separate echelon with one battalion from each of three regions: Northern (Auckland), Central (Wellington) and Southern (South Island). First Echelon (18 NZ Bn, 19 NZ Bn and 20 NZ Bn) entered camp on 3 October 1939; Second Echelon (21 NZ Bn, 22 NZ Bn and 23 NZ Bn) on 12 January 1940; and Third Echelon (24 NZ Bn, 25 NZ Bn and 26 NZ Bn) on 16 May 1940. 27 NZ Bn was the machine-gun (MG) battalion and 28 (Māori) Bn the pioneer battalion, but they were trained as infantry. There was also the Divisional Cavalry Regiment with armoured cars, three field-artillery regiments (numbered 4, 5 and 6), one anti-tank regiment (7), three field companies of engineers, a field engineer park, and four reserve mechanical transport companies equipped with 3-ton trucks. Following basic training, First Echelon reached Egypt in January 1940. Second Echelon, sailing in May, was diverted to Britain and arrived in Egypt in

March 1941, and Third Echelon arrived in Egypt in late September 1940.



This group of 21 NZ Bn soldiers is pictured in Greece. In March 1941 Maj-Gen Bernard Freyberg, GOC 2nd NZ Division, in an official address that articulated many of the challenges that lay ahead, told his men the German soldier 'is fighting with difficult communications, in country where he cannot use his strong armoured forces to the best advantage ... the Germans will be meeting men who are fitter, stronger and better trained than they are. You can shoot and you can march long distances without fatigue. By your resolute shooting and sniping, and by fierce patrolling by night you can tame any enemy you may encounter' (quoted in Cody 1953: 34). He also told them that in an encounter battle, 'time will be against you, there will always be noise and confusion, orders may arrive late,

nerves will be strained, you will be attacked from the air. All these factors and others must be expected on the field of battle. But you have been trained physically to endure long marches and fatigue' (quoted in Cody 1953: 35). In his diary he was more pessimistic and wrote that 'We shall be fighting against heavy odds in numbers. I hope the effect it will have will in the end justify the campaign' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 66). (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-12227-F)

Organization and doctrine followed the British example. Field Service Regulation (FSR) 1929 stated 'The proper co-operation of all arms wins battles' (quoted in French 2000: 18) and the regular 1938-type infantry division (three brigades and an armoured reconnaissance regiment) used by New Zealand mandated a truck for each infantry platoon to carry equipment and enough trucks in the divisional motor pool to transport one brigade. Infantry battalions lacked firepower, though, because their support companies were re-formed into rifle companies and battalion commanders were dependent on the division's 54 guns. Doctrinally, tanks were supposed to be an essential component of an infantry attack and Freyberg wanted a tank battalion to be the basis for an armoured brigade within his division that would also include 27 NZ MG Bn, another infantry battalion, an artillery battalion and the divisional cavalry. The War Office vetoed this and instead wanted the standard armoured-car battalion, two tank battalions and two infantry battalions – a structure that would need time to build and which was unachievable in 1941.



Rather than copying the Germans and concentrating its mobile troops into separate divisions, Britain wanted to give some mobility to all its formations. The New Zealand forces followed this force structure and were well equipped with motor transport with each platoon having a Morris truck, shown here below the mountains of northern Greece. Furthermore, the provision of enough trucks to move an infantry brigade permitted the New Zealanders in Greece to carry out an orderly withdrawal. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-01591-F)

Germany

In the 1920s the German military, despite tanks being banned by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, still realized mobile forces could have a decisive impact upon the battlefield and created for each of Germany's seven infantry divisions a battalion of *Kraftfahrtruppen* (motor troops) to carry men and supplies. By 1933 they comprised a company each of trucks, armoured cars, anti-tank guns and motorcyclists and were renamed *Kraftfahrkampftruppen* (combat motor troops). When the first three Panzer divisions were formed in 1935, proponents of the use of armoured forces had already realized that the tank could only be successful if it cooperated with other arms, and the importance of ground reconnaissance to establish the nature of the terrain and discover the strength, intentions and whereabouts of the enemy was well understood. Every Panzer and motorized-infantry division had an *Aufklärungs-Abteilung* assigned for this purpose; it was comprised of two *Panzerspähwagen-* (armoured car) *Kompanien*, a *schwere* (heavy) *Kompanie*, and a *Kradschützen-Kompanie*. Not until 1941, however, did all these divisions also have a *Kradschützen-Bataillon* (with a standard organization of a *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie*, a *schwere Kompanie* and three *Kradschützen-Kompanien*) attached to the *Schützen-Brigade*, and of those that did prior to this date, their composition differed markedly.



In 1930, Oberstleutnant Heinz Guderian commanded *Kraftfahr-Abteilung* 3, whose 4. *Kompanie* equipped with motorcycles and 1. *Kompanie* in police armoured cars made up the reconnaissance elements; 2. and 3. *Kompanien* with dummy tanks and dummy guns were the main body. When the 1919 Treaty of Versailles was fully renounced in 1934, 1. and 2. *Kraftfahrkampftuppen-Brigaden* were temporarily formed from the *Kraftfahr* units. In this photograph, taken in 1935, sidecars from a *Kraftfahr-Abteilung* are on exercise. (Author's Collection)



In a Panzer breakthrough, *Kradschützen* were to accompany the tanks. In 1940, 1., 2. and 3. Panzer-Divisionen each had a *Kradschützen-Bataillon* (4., 5. and 10. did not), and in all except 10. Panzer-Division each *Schützen-Regiment* had two *Kradschützen-Kompanien* (organized according to KStn 1111a). Panzer divisions that were originally *leichte* (light) *Divisionen* (6., 7., 8. and 9.) had no *Kradschützen-Kompanien* in their *Schützen-Regimenter*. Here, a sidecar tentatively follows a Panzer through a wood in France during May 1940. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-124-0243-24 / Foto: Frühling)

Determining the nature of the terrain for follow-on forces was an important role for the *Aufklärungs-Abteilung*, but finding out about enemy defences led to heavier combat. Operationally, the unit would attempt to bypass opposition or exploit following a set-piece battle and generally would be held in reserve or on a flank if serious opposition threatened. Even so, as the *Kradschützen-Bataillon* was the fastest ground combat force, with an average marching speed of 22mph (it was 11mph for tanks and 16mph for wheeled vehicles), it was frequently the first to offer assistance. When *Aufklärungs-Abteilungen* found it difficult to force the Greek passes in 1941, the *Kradschützen-Bataillone* would lead the way.

Doctrine for reconnaissance forces, as expressed in *Heerensdienstvorschrift* (HdV: Army Service Manual) 299/10, defined types of mission rather than precise methodology. A fundamental difference between tactical and combat reconnaissance was established: reconnaissance units specialized in the former, where a ‘detailed determination of the enemy’s concentrations, his approach routes, his organisation, his deployment and the extent of his forces in both

depth and width' was required, while the latter 'creates the prerequisites for the conduct of the fight. All branches are involved in it' (quoted in Edwards 2014: 22). Combat was not unexpected in tactical reconnaissance as manoeuvrability permitted 'limited-objective attacks against the wings, flanks, and rear of the enemy with the element of surprise' (quoted in Edwards 2014: 25), and in order to break through and regain freedom of manoeuvre, attacks against an enemy in line by reconnaissance units could be reinforced with troops from other units.



New Zealand troops learn to throw grenades during training in the Middle East, 1940. The New Zealand historian John McLeod described how recruits had a belligerent scepticism because rigid formality did not exist in New Zealand society. Officers had to know when to tolerate infringements and when not to let discipline slide. In Egypt the leave scale was generous: at Maadi Camp, 8 miles from Cairo, 20 per cent per company in 19 NZ Bn were allowed weekday evening passes that opened at 1700hrs and two-thirds day passes at the weekend. New Zealand soldiers realized their pay and rations were better than those of the British, but when a sergeant complained to Freyberg that poor rations were affecting shooting skills, an extra 1d per day was granted each man. (Photo by Popperfoto/Getty Images)

RECRUITMENT, LOGISTICS AND MORALE

New Zealand

In the 1930s, when anti-militarism was prevalent, Kippenberger wrote that the Army 'had no support from or sympathy from the Government or the great

majority of the public ... only about 40% [of TA recruits] ever attended camps' (quoted in Woods 2012: 16). When war was declared the situation changed and volunteers numbered 59,644 (but 25 per cent were declared medically unfit) before conscription was introduced on 23 July 1940. Many recruits, 98 per cent of whom had parents born in Britain, volunteered because their friends and colleagues did so. Opportunity to travel was also a reason to join up. *The New Zealand Herald* newspaper reported, 'Active service always had an appeal to the adventurous which routine training did not possess' (quoted in Dawson 1961: 2). Eric Davies wanted 'adventure, pure and simple' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 9). He worked for a farmer on the North Island – a World War I veteran who expected him to volunteer. Recruits were paid well: 35 shillings per week; this was a good wage at the time. Initially, other ranks had to be single and between the ages of 21 and 35, but on 11 April 1940 the upper age limit was extended to 40 and to married men. For some the age limitations were no hindrance; 50-year-old Andy Anderson joined 19 NZ Bn pretending to be 39.



Out of a sample of 108 recruits for 21 NZ Bn in 1939 examined by Peter Woods, one was a regular, one had served in World War I, and only 44 per cent had one year or more in the Territorial Army. Just over one-third (34 per cent) were aged 20–24, and only 10 per cent had rural occupations. For recruits, dealing with authority was initially difficult. The men complained when the government banned the carrying out of alcohol from hotels. Placards reading 'No beer, no drill' appeared around camp. Colonel Neil Lloyd Macky dispersed 150 recruits who gathered to demonstrate about the

ruling. Peter Preston, a 20-year-old subaltern and former private-school boy from Christchurch, had a similar problem when recruits who arrived at Burnham Camp went to the local hotel and he had to prise them out. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-07148-G)

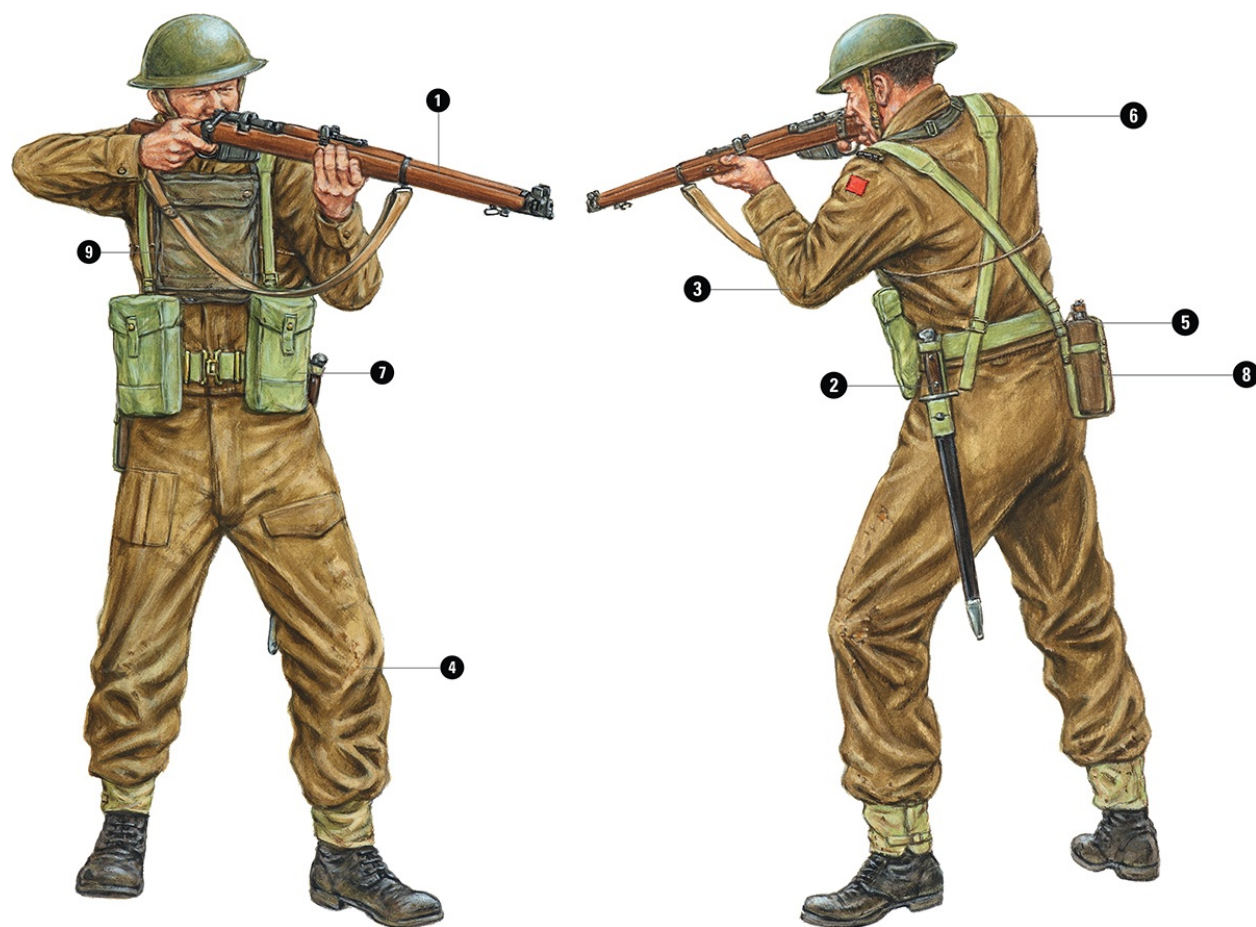
During World War I, 508 Māori had served in the New Zealand (Māori) Pioneer Battalion. On 4 October 1939, the government announced the formation of another Māori battalion; by the end of the month, 900 Māori had enlisted. To honour those that had already served by following in their footsteps was a powerful motive, as was the prospect of foreign adventure and an urge not to miss out. The prestige (*mana*) of the individual was tied to the prestige of the tribe and was enhanced by past military achievements; therefore the attitude of tribal leaders determined the number of recruits each tribe provided.

Initially, the government wanted white officers and NCOs in senior positions for 28 (Māori) Bn, but soon relented and asked for Māori officers or ex-officers who wanted to volunteer and sought other suitable individuals. The majority of the 1,000 officers required for 2 NZEF either had experience in school cadets or the TA; those that joined the Territorials were men with more leisure time, frequently of financial means, and thus principally from the educated middle classes. Age limits were: second lieutenants and lieutenants under 30, captains under 35, majors under 40, and lieutenant-colonels under 45.

Pat Koorey, a tailor with 12 years in the TA, volunteered and on 27 September 1939 attended a week's intensive course at Trentham where he was taught 'Bayonet – infantry drill – Lewis Gun – compass reading – tactics – organisation' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 34) before being appointed a second lieutenant; in Greece he would command 19 NZ Bn's AA Platoon. On 8 November 1939, officers of 21 NZ Bn attended a refresher course at Narrow Neck District School and prospective student officers joined on 9 December. Some were from First Echelon, others from the TA and some new to the Army.

COMBAT Private, 18 NZ Bn

Servia, 14–15 April 1941



This plate depicts a New Zealand soldier from 18 NZ Bn during the defence of the heights above Servia on 15 April 1941. Having landed in Greece in early March, up to 9 April he was digging trenches on the plain north of Mount Olympus. The invasion of Yugoslavia prompted a hasty redeployment for his brigade to the mountains above Servia in order to defend the nearby pass at Stena Portas. He has experienced cold and snowy conditions at this altitude, but would have known that the defensive positions he had the time and tools to prepare would intimidate any enemy.

Weapons, dress and equipment

This soldier's rifle (1) is the .303in No. 1 Mk 3 Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE), capable of holding ten rounds in the magazine. The Pattern 07 bayonet, 18in long, is in its scabbard (2), directly attached to the webbing belt. Battle dress was issued to the New Zealand soldiers before Greece and consisted of a short blouse jacket (3) and baggy trousers (4) that allowed freedom of movement. The material – khaki wool serge – was heavy, warm and long lasting.

British 1937-pattern webbing, which was a light-tan colour with interchangeable parts and stamped-brass fittings, was also issued. The webbing was coated with pale-green Blanco designed to protect it from the elements and offer some camouflage, but the colour differed according to how much was put on and if it had faded. Standard components included a belt (5), cross-straps (6), cartridge pouches (7), a water bottle and carrier (8) and a small haversack for Marching Order. This soldier is in Battle Order and does not carry the haversack. He wears a respirator sack (9) on the front, but carries no gas cape or entrenching tool. He has used his gas cape as a poncho in his entrenchment. All told, this equipment weighed roughly 40lb.

Germany

The German Army underwent a rapid expansion from 1935, when military conscription was introduced, making those aged between 18 and 45 liable for military service. Those born before World War I were reservists, with younger men called up into the regulars. The pre-World War II recruit, who probably had six months' experience of a military regime in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labour Service), reported for duty in the autumn. The peacetime Army was highly professional and gave civilian recruits a good level of military understanding before releasing them back to civilian life. Basic training lasted 12 weeks. German infantry training then recreated battlefield conditions by using live-fire exercises. Specific training with different weapon types followed. The *Kraftfahrkampftruppenschule* in Wünsdorf, established in 1936, trained all motorized troops including motorcyclists. In 1937 the school divided into the *Panzertruppenschule* and *Kavallerieschule Döberitz* that was responsible for motorization issues. The latter became the *Kavallerieschule Krampnitz* in 1938 and comprised five *Schwadronen*, one of which was the *Kradschützen-Lehrschwadron*. In 1939 Oberstleutnant (later General der Panzertruppen) Hasso von Manteuffel was the academic director at Krampnitz.



Cross-country capability could offer more options to penetrate an enemy screen, but if the weather worsened, motorcycles as well as wheeled armoured cars slowed down – as the rider of this sidecar on a dirt road in Greece during May 1941 has discovered – and became vulnerable to bogging down and ambush. (Photo by Keystone/Getty Images)

Kradschützen units had many different origins. In October 1935, II. Schwadron/Reiter-Regiment 16 was redesignated *Kradschützen-Bataillon 2* and made part of 2. Panzer-Division. The unit was based in Eisenach, where Manteuffel served as a company commander, and moved into temporary wooden buildings before a new facility built for them at Bad Kissingen called the Manteuffel Kaserne was occupied on 1 June 1937. In March 1938, the division deployed to Austria and took up residence in Eisenstadt. In September 1939, the division advanced 150 miles into southern Poland and captured Lemberg (now Lviv, Ukraine). In May 1940, during the invasion of France, *Kradschützen-Bataillon 2* was at the forefront during the exploitation from the bridgehead over the Meuse River at Sedan and reached Abbeville on the Channel coast on 20 May, which cut off the British Expeditionary Force, and captured Boulogne (22–24 May 1940). Hauptmann Kurt Creuznacher was temporarily the commanding officer as Oberstleutnant Carl Stollbrock was wounded. Creuznacher would command the unit again in May 1941 as a *Major*.

Kradschützen-Bataillon 55 from 5. Panzer-Division was formed from Schützen-Regiment 13 and was commanded from August 1940 by Oberstleutnant Hans Schacke. In Poland the division also advanced on Lemberg. In France the division crossed the Meuse River in Belgium south of Namur before exploiting towards Dunkirk. In June Rouen was captured and the British 51st (Highland) Division defeated at Saint-Valery. The next stage of the campaign took the division to Brittany. The division redeployed to Bulgaria in March 1941 and would fight in Greece before elements deployed to Crete in May 1941, remaining there until July.



There was more German emphasis on *Kradschützen* than in other armies because motorcycles

were in plentiful supply and the availability of armoured cars for reconnaissance forces was relatively poor. The road networks in Western Europe did not pose a problem for this structure. In June 1940, during the pursuit across France, *Kradschützen* benefited from a good road network, mild weather and a demoralized enemy. Here, a motorcycle column proceeds down a tree-lined road, typical of those in northern France. (Author's Collection)

Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 from 9. Panzer Division was formed on 1 August 1940 by renaming I. Bataillon/Aufklärungs-Abteilung 9 (formerly Kraftfahr-Jäger-Bataillon 4 of the Austrian Bundesheer in 1938). The unit fought in Poland, the Low Countries and France. In May 1940 the division invaded Holland before redeploying against the Dunkirk perimeter. A pursuit to Orléans and Poitiers followed. Major Wilhelm Schmalz assumed command of Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 on 7 September 1940. The division would attack Greece through Yugoslavia in April 1941 and then quickly redeploy for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

WEAPONRY, TRAINING AND TACTICS

New Zealand

The New Zealanders had equipment the British Army had procured in the inter-war years – accurate, light weapons for Imperial policing operations that were designed for marksmen who would not expend excessive amounts of ammunition. The standard weapon was the 1903 Lee-Enfield rifle, a bolt-action weapon capable of firing 15 rounds per minute. The World War I-era .303in Lewis gun that was the standard section machine gun was replaced by the .303in Bren light machine gun, but the new weapon was unable to put down a large volume of fire. Each platoon had a 2in mortar, weighing 10.5lb, but it mostly only had smoke rounds. Sections were small and not designed to be divided into separate manoeuvre and fire-support elements; rather this separation was achieved at platoon level.

Before the war, attendance at the few TA summer camps the government funded fell as civilian businesses would not spare men. Platoon tactics were taught for one day, and company tactics on another. In 1939 the intensive training given to the new units was more productive. Army HQ directed military districts to inculcate 'hard physical fitness, skill in the use of weapons and the development of the fighting spirit' (quoted in Woods 2012: 72). Initial training was mandated at eight weeks (40 days) with weekends off, but the issuing of clothing, inoculations and parades reduced training time. Shooting and tactical training at platoon level and below was supposed to be emphasized, but battalion commanding officers dictated the approach. Even though he was

instructed to stick to platoon-level training, Lt-Col Macky adopted a more ambitious approach with 21 NZ Bn: in order to train his senior officers and NCOs, company- and even battalion-level tactical training was attempted. Army HQ found out what was going on and wrote to military districts that advanced training was 'too ambitious' and elementary training was not 'sufficiently thorough' (quoted in Woods 2012: 73).



Only in early 1941, before the New Zealanders went to Greece, was the .45in M1928 Thompson submachine gun issued to them; 50-round drum or 20-round box magazines were used. For soldiers such as the recruit shown here, the Thompson proved popular as an offensive weapon, as the attack itself was used to deal with the troops' fear. Maj Humphrey Dyer, OC D Coy, 28 (Māori) Bn, praised Tommy-gunners at Olympus Pass on 16 April 'who went out looking for more' (quoted in Gardiner 1994: 52). (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-01069B-F)

21 NZ Bn had 12 weeks' basic training because the embarkation of Second Echelon was delayed. On 2 May 1940 the echelon set sail, but on 15 May was diverted to South Africa. In June the battalion arrived at Aldershot in England. There were opportunities for advanced training during brigade manoeuvres, but because 5 NZ Bde (including the Māori) had four battalions, one (usually

Macky's) was used to play the enemy. On 3 August a 100-mile march was completed in a week, followed by a move to Dover to join XII Corps preparing to repel an invasion force. In November the battalion settled into winter quarters around Camberley before departing for Egypt on 3 January 1941, arriving on 3 March. On 16 March 21 NZ Bn departed for Greece.



The .303in Vickers, the standard British machine gun that had served in World War I, fired at 450 rounds per minute. The gun weighed 40lb and the tripod, 48.5lb. Vickers guns were organized into battalions, but were deployed in platoons to support individual infantry battalions. Here, a Vickers gun from 27 (MG) Bn is set up at Elasson to cover the Allied withdrawal from the Servia position in Greece. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-13609-F)



Here, Māori soldiers are training in Maadi Camp in Egypt in 1941 following their return from Crete. Sgt-Maj Rennie wrote of the difficulties he experienced with potential officers training at Trentham, a World War I barracks 19 miles from Wellington: 'It wasn't very sensible of us to have issued two battle dresses to each of them before they departed. I had a real problem when they returned, because when I called the roll I had on parade 170 instead of 146'; he 'went over and found 24 lying under the beds' (quoted in www.28maoribattalion.org.nz) and upon completion of training still thought some had completed that had not started. Military discipline along Western lines was difficult for Māori to appreciate and they also happily shared kit and duties, not thinking this at odds with individual responsibility. In Māori society, to be wronged brought on a state of melancholy and the soul was only restored by obtaining revenge. Traditional games like Te Rakau improved hand-eye coordination and instilled a preference for the bayonet. Sgt-Maj Rennie recalled that 'Their boundless and infectious enthusiasm and their tremendous pride in their reputation as warriors was something I had to see to believe. I saw it again and again. Many times I was personally grateful for it' (quoted in Gardiner 1994: 28). Freyberg recorded that 'no infantry battalion had a more distinguished record, or saw more fighting, or, alas, had such heavy casualties than the Maori Battalion' (quoted in www.28maoribattalion.org.nz). (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-02101-F)

18 NZ Bn and 19 NZ Bn followed a different path: on 5 January 1940 they departed for Egypt and arrived at Maadi Camp in February. When the battalions sailed, only 75 per cent of their men were classified with the rifle. British Army schools of instruction took quotas of New Zealanders, with personnel undertaking specialist courses in tactics, weapons training, signals and motor transport; on returning, the students instructed the rest of the unit. There was steady progression to company training; higher-unit manoeuvres were found wanting, however. On 22 April the division carried out a four-day exercise in the desert. The final attack was a fiasco and Freyberg rounded on the battalion COs. From June 1940 a training syllabus, based on the War Office's Military Training Pamphlet No. 37 'The Training of an Infantry Battalion', was rigorously applied. Training was interrupted, though, as infantry were needed to dig entrenchments and guard installations. When Freyberg observed a refresher course with the rifle in January 1941, he noted how the standard of weapon training was low.

The New Zealanders were made familiar with tanks. FSR 1935 made specific reference to anti-tank doctrine and recommended the use of obstacles, minefields and anti-tank rifles; however, neither anti-tank rifles nor anti-tank guns existed in New Zealand. Military Training Pamphlet No. 23, 'Operations: Part IX, The Infantry Division in the Attack', issued in July 1940, emphasized the 'closest cooperation between tanks and infantry' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 50) and on 20 August an exercise involving 20 NZ Bn, the Divisional Cavalry Regiment and two 19 NZ Bn companies showed how tanks were 'unable to break through a strong infantry line, and suffered large casualties through bunching in the wadis' (Sinclair 1954: 34). In September, defensive positions were established at Baggush in Egypt with D Coy, 27 (MG) Bn in support and a Bofors troop from 3 Regt RHA and D Tp, 4 Fd Regt RNZA sited in an anti-tank role. A specially picked platoon from 19 NZ Bn was then trained by engineers in tank hunting and during an exercise on 28 September, light tanks and Bren-gun carriers acted as enemy. An offensive exercise with tanks and Bren-gun carriers forward and infantry in trucks 200yd behind 'debussing and rushing forward when the tanks joined action' was also practised by 18 NZ Bn and was 'very nice, so long as there is no real danger of the enemy there to mess things up' (Dawson 1961: 61).

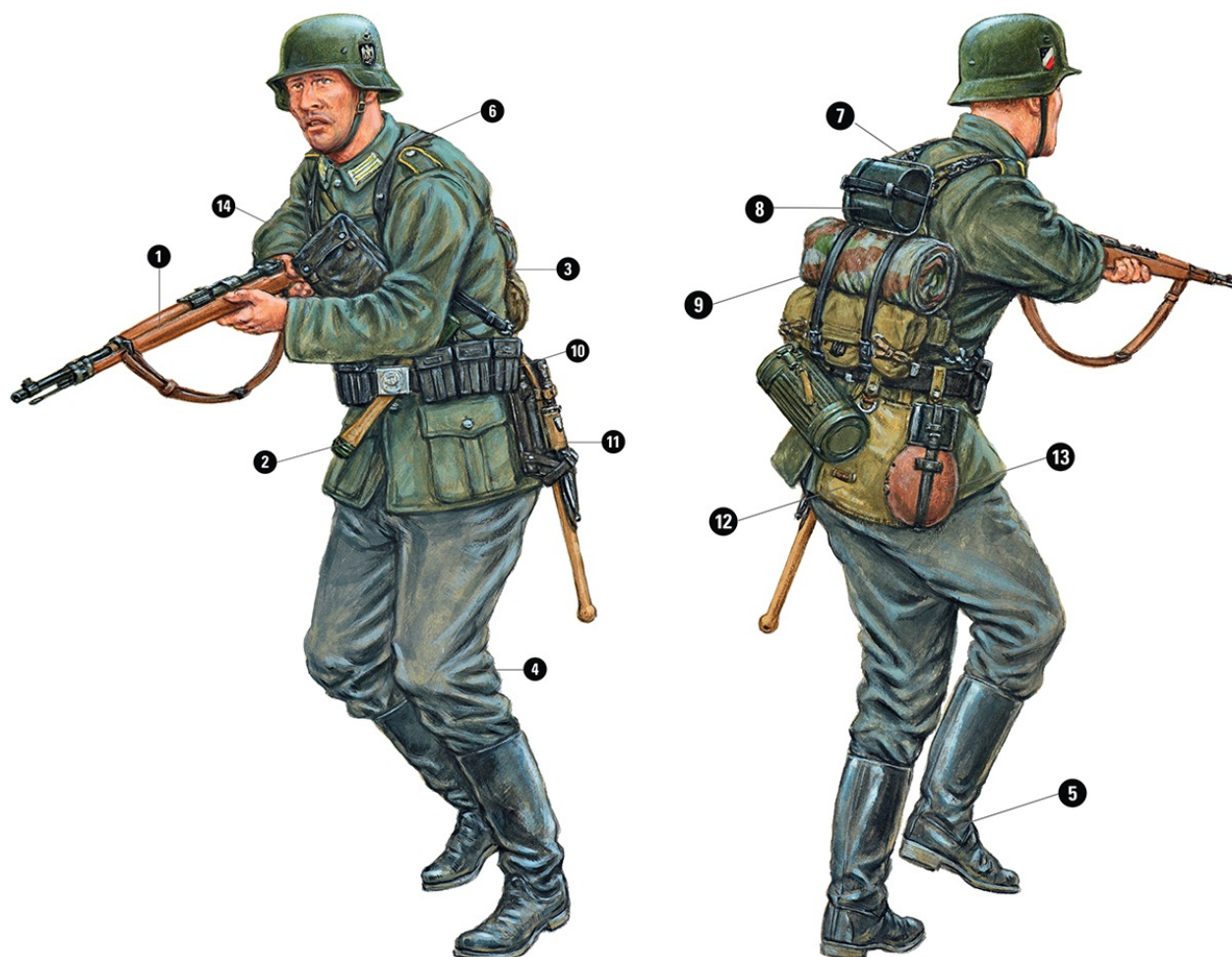
A move to Helwan training camp followed, where defence against dive-bombing and street fighting was practised. In February 1941 a river crossing with assault boats was conducted by 18 NZ Bn. Training emphasized the importance of coordinating battalion units and advancing under fire with real bullets. Kippenberger made 20 NZ Bn practise coordination and different

tactical manoeuvres and would write that ‘many times in Greece I was thankful for our careful training in the procedure of issuing orders and our innumerable exercises and discussions on it’ (Kippenberger 1949: 26). On 28 February 1941, 200 reinforcements brought 19 NZ Bn to full strength: 32 officers and 741 other ranks, with seven officers and 44 other ranks as first reinforcements. On 3 March, 4 NZ Bde moved out for Greece.

On 1 May 1940, 28 (Māori) Bn embarked at Wellington and arrived in England ‘having received only elementary training and some instruction in minor tactics’ (Cody 1956: 33). In July the Māori were transported by bus and prepared defensive positions for an all-round defence. A move to another area followed and defensive positions were established from where parties were sent out on exercise to deal with enemy airborne landings. In August a week’s route march was followed by a battalion attack. In September the battalion was judged fit for front-line service and expected to deploy to Egypt, but instead went to the Dover–Folkestone area in south-east England with XII Corps. Route marches every other day with each company taking different routes, and weapons training courses and field firing exercises, took the place of larger-scale manoeuvres. On 3 January 1941, the Māori departed for Egypt and arrived at Suez on 3 March. At Helwan Camp, 300 reinforcements under Capt F. Baker formed a replacement company. On 27 March, the battalion arrived in Greece.

COMBAT Schütze, Kradschützen-Bataillon 59

Servia, 14–15 April 1941



This plate depicts a soldier from Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 during the action at Servia on 15 April 1941. His parent formation, 9. Panzer-Division, had invaded Yugoslavia on 6 April and in the lead the motorcycle troops had motored through the mountains of Macedonia before passing through the Monastir Gap into Greece. On 13 April he experienced a sharp battle against British soldiers supported by tanks at Ptolemais that resulted in the enemy withdrawing. In the early morning of 15 April he waded the Aliakmon River without his sidecar and is shown here approaching the mountains above Servia. He was told that aerial reconnaissance had identified few enemy defences, yet his objective of moving through the mountains to open up the pass from the rear seems daunting.

Weapons, dress and equipment

His weapon is the 7.92mm Karabiner 98 *kurz* (1), introduced in 1935, which was a Mauser bolt-

action rifle with an internal magazine that took five rounds. An M24 *Stielhandgranate* stick grenade (2) is carried inside the belt. Because of the handle, the stick grenade could be thrown further than the British Mills grenade and would not roll back down slopes, but fewer could be carried. Uniform consisted of the *Feldgrau* (field-grey) M40 wool tunic (3) with *Feldgrau* collar and shoulder straps, M36 trousers (4) and high black boots (5) with hobnails and iron heels. His shoulder straps are piped golden yellow for his battalion (some *Kradschützen* units had different-coloured piping). Leather Y-straps (6) passing over the shoulders, had three hooks; two were attached to the back of the ammunition pouches worn on the soldier's belt at the front and the third to the back of the belt. There were also two D rings on the shoulders and auxiliary straps that were used to attach the *Sturmgepacke* (assault pack; 7). On the *Sturmgepacke* a cooking pot (8), a *Sturmgepacke* bag and a folded-up *Zeltbahn* (shelter-quarter; 9) are attached. M1911 ammunition pouches (10) each had three pockets holding two five-round clips, making 30 rounds per pouch. A bayonet and an entrenching tool are carried in the same housing (11). The outer surface of the bread bag (12) had a loop to attach the water bottle (13), which had a felt cover to conceal and protect it while insulating the water. A gas-cape pouch (14) is carried across his front on a long strap. All told, his equipment weighs roughly 45lb.

Germany

From 1935 the German Army relied on the 7.92mm Karabiner 98 kurz (Kar 98k) bolt-action rifle as its standard infantry weapon, but also developed the 9mm Maschinenpistole (MP) 38 submachine gun, weighing 9lb and fitted with a 32-round magazine and capable of firing 500 rounds per minute, though in April 1941 it was not issued widely. The 7.92mm Maschinengewehr (MG) 34 general-purpose machine gun, belt-fed and mounted on a bipod, was generously issued, however – two per *Gruppe* – and was also mounted on a tripod as an effective company-level support weapon. The MG 34 was the main weapon of the *Kradschützen-Gruppe* with all members carrying additional ammunition for it. Ammunition was either carried in drums of 50 or 75 rounds that could be fitted to the weapon for mobile assault, or in 50-round belts that could be linked together and were more suited to stationary defensive positions. During sustained fire the barrel had to be changed to prevent overheating. The *Kradschützen-Bataillon* also had six 8cm Granatwerfer (GrW) 34 mortars at its disposal, each capable of firing a 7.7lb round some 2,625yd. The *schwere Kompanie* operated two 7.5cm Infanteriegeschütz (IG) 37 infantry guns and three 3.7cm Panzerabwehrkanone (PaK) 35/36 anti-tank guns. The battalion commander either kept the mortars and machine guns of the *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* and the guns of the *schwere Kompanie* together, or allocated them to the *Kradschützen-Kompanien* as the situation demanded.



Before 1941, *Kradschützen-Bataillone* had different organizations, with those in 6. and 8. Panzer-Divisionen (KStN 1113) lacking a *schwere Kompanie* (but their *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* was carried in trucks and included a *Panzerjäger-Zug*). 7. Panzer Division's had only two *Kradschützen-Kompanien* (KStN 1111a) and no *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie*, though the *schwere Kompanie* included a *Granatwerfer-Zug*; and 9. Panzer Division's had three *Kradschützen-Kompanien* (KStN 1111) and no *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* but a *schwere Kompanie* that included a *Granatwerfer-Zug* and two *Infanteriegeschütz-Züge* (their *Pionier-Zug* resided with battalion HQ). Here, a 7.5cm IG 37 from *Kradschützen-Bataillon 59* is shown deployed to fire in Poland in 1939. The gun threw a 12lb shell 5,630yd. (Author's Collection)

Auftragstaktik (mission-oriented command) gave commanders latitude and was particularly utilized by motorcycle troops. Because doctrine required commanders to use their initiative at all levels, officer training taught a common tactical understanding in order that superior officers could rely upon them to carry out tactical drills. Understanding the intent of the commander enabled this methodology to work effectively, yet training was also important

and numerous hypothetical exercises were carried out following the guidance of various manuals written by junior staff officers. These booklets, wrote Oberst (later Generaloberst) Heinz Guderian in 1935, were ‘in the form of examples that will make the training entrusted to junior officers and NCOs easier’, and Hauptmann Hans-Wolfgang von Fabeck described them as inculcating ‘a tactically proper response and decision making early on by means of certain well-defined school exercises’ (quoted in Edwards 2015: 4). *Kradfahrer! Kradschützen!*, written in 1935 by Major Hasso von Manteuffel when he was attached to the Reichskriegministerium, specifically examined the organization, equipment and training of motorcycle troops.

Manteuffel listed the role of each individual soldier in a *Kradschützen-Kompanie*. He provided detailed instruction as to what orders commanders of a *Gruppe*, *Zug* and *Kompanie* should give in different situations. For example, he specified how *Gruppen* should move in line ahead with the section leader and his messenger forward, followed by the two-man machine-gun team and the three riflemen who carried ammunition for the MG 34. Other issues were covered, such as how to move a sidecar over obstacles, ride over obstacles, ride up and down hill, where to dismount and laager sidecars relative to the terrain and the enemy, and distances to maintain while riding. Also, the following tactical scenarios at *Kompanie* level were described: covering a *Schützen-Regiment* from enemy attack from the flank, deploying behind a hill to ambush an enemy trying to sweep around a *Schützen-Regiment*, deploying when halted for all-round defence, deploying to defend a hill, approach to battle, the battle itself and the counter-attack. Illustrations showed how to deploy for fire effect and the hand signals needed to achieve this. During training these scenarios were examined in detail by an umpire, and participants were debriefed thoroughly following the mission. The need to avoid falling into a mindless templating was stressed and exercises were rehearsed on a sand table. Other soldiers due to carry out the same training would observe.



Proficiency in handling a motorcycle was the primary emphasis in training and each *Gruppe* had three dedicated drivers. The training ground was specifically designed to provide a challenging course with variations in height and obstacles that had to be driven over and through. Here, this sidecar rider has managed to elevate his sidecar. (Author's Collection)

In France in May and June 1940, the *Kradschützen* proved adept at seizing vital terrain and motored ahead to capture bridges. They were expected to fight, and as they were out in front were often the first to storm into a town to facilitate a speedy capture. When enemy positions needed to be overwhelmed, the motorcyclists frequently were given direct ground-combat roles. Their mobility was hindered when the weather broke and intractable mud would sometimes compel them to march on foot. During the pursuit over the Seine River the *Kradschützen* were frequently unsupported and used separate routes from other combat elements of their divisions. Casualties were high as counter-attacks were experienced and no immediate relief force was available. Ambushes could happen at any time, as could skirmishes with rearguards. The skills of junior leaders were tested to the full as they had to react quickly to changing situations. Officers sought to find weaknesses in the enemy line and press on around the flanks. Sometimes *Kradschützen* would be surrounded by

the retreating enemy and all-round defensive positions were adopted. Short on fuel and supplies, the motorcycle troops had to make efficient use of the resources to hand. Patrolling at night was carried out. The close presence of the enemy was usual. Small units practised fire-and-manoevre tactics to extricate themselves from daunting situations that threatened to overwhelm them. The unpredictability of the battlefield was experienced by the majority of *Kradschützen* personnel. Rapid, risk-intensive advances were habitual and creative combat solutions frequently made up for a lack of firepower and armoured protection.



Here, a 7.92mm MG 34 general-purpose machine gun is set up on a tripod to fire as a *schwere Maschinengewehr* (heavy machine gun) from cover in 1939. The *Kradschützen-Kompanie* had four organizational versions and they primarily differed in the number of machine guns allocated to them. In KStn 1111, issued in October 1937, each *Gruppe* had nine men in three sidecars with one MG 34 and each *Kompanie* had an *sMG-Gruppe* of two MG 34s. KStn 1111a, issued in 1938, increased the *Gruppe* to four sidecars and two MG 34s and the *sMG-Gruppe* to a *Zug* of four MG 34s and eight sidecars. KStn 1112, formally issued in February 1941, established this machine-gun allocation for all *Kradschützen-Kompanien*. KStn 1113, issued only for 6. and 8. Panzer-Divisionen in 1940, gave each *Gruppe* four sidecars and two MG 34s and each *Kompanie* an *sMG-Gruppe* of two *schwere Maschinengewehre* carried in trucks. By April 1941 all *Kradschützen-Kompanien* were organized according to KStn 1112. (Author's Collection)

COMMAND, CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS

New Zealand

A radio link from brigade to battalion was the best that could be expected and at defensive positions at Platamon only on 13 April was a wireless set established at Rear Battalion HQ; otherwise Maj E.A. Harding, 2IC 21 NZ Bn, would still have had to drive to Brigade HQ for orders. Instead, telephone lines were relied upon, but these could be cut by enemy action. At the Pinios River on 17 April the communications situation was dire because following the retreat from Platamon, telephone cable was abandoned and only a single line was available to the Australian battalion on the flank, there was no line to brigade and Lt Allan Yeoman reported 'communications from Bn to coys nil' (Yeoman 1941: 2). Also, junior officers were not in communication with their company commanders as platoons were dispersed and had no wireless or telephones to report enemy movements. In such situations the battalion commander's impact could be decisive, but Macky did not influence the course of the battle. Situated in a deep ditch, he could not observe events and was always looking at his western flank. Freyberg would sack him on Crete. Freyberg's GSO 1, Lt-Col K. Stewart, stated that 'bad orders, bad dispositions, and I would add absence of determination and fighting spirit in the CO were the causes of the disaster' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 96).



Freyberg, although schooled in New Zealand, was not known to the New Zealanders as in 1914 he

joined the Royal Naval Division. He fought at Gallipoli and on the Somme, where as a battalion commander he won the Victoria Cross. Following the end of World War I he accepted a commission in the Guards. He retired in 1937, but was recalled and appointed commander of 2nd NZ Division on 22 November 1939. 2/Lt Charles Bennett of 28 (Māori) Bn described him as 'a real pukka English officer ... by Jove, this chap doesn't seem to be a New Zealander' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 28–29). However, he would command 2nd NZ Division throughout the war and cared for his men's welfare, trying to refuse overly hazardous tasks or the parcelling-out of his command. (Alexander Turnbull Library, PA-1-q-287-0744)



Signals within the battalion relied on the field telephone and there were few radios. McLeod has suggested the homogenous nature of New Zealand society – where those who became officers and rankers went to school and worked together – promoted a close understanding that would lead to many soldiers taking the initiative when their superior was out of action. When leaders were lost 'the men had the knowledge and confidence to continue to pursue their group battle objectives' (McLeod 1986: 186). Certainly such an appreciation would have more currency in later campaigns. In Greece, coordination of the battalion's efforts by the commander was vital to success. Here, Capt C. Borman and Lt A. Hultquist, both signals officers, are shown setting up telephone wire in the hills above Servia in March 1941. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-01180-F)

The campaign in Greece and Crete was physically and mentally demanding and persuaded Freyberg that he should have 'replaced the old age group with

younger men who as a rule, although less experienced as fighting soldiers, stood up better to the physical and mental strain of a long and bitter series of battles' (quoted in McLeod 1986: 101). Brig Edward Puttick, who commanded 4 NZ Bde, was described by Kippenberger as 'practical and effective in Greece' – his brigade was 'well disciplined and well trained and he must be entitled to a great deal of the credit' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 28–29). He was the only brigade commander who was a regular soldier as Brig James Hargest, OC 5 NZ Bde, was a TA officer initially turned down for regular service because he suffered from shell shock. He appealed to the New Zealand Prime Minister and was reinstated. His performance on Crete, where the lack of communications was worse, proved questionable. Those officers that were retained found that they tended to spend longer in command appointments than officers in other armies because promotion was slower in the small New Zealand force, and they developed close relationships with fellow officers and their men.

In Māori society, leaders led by example rather than by issuing commands. According to the ethnographer Elsdon Best, discipline was won by respect for the leader and traditionally if the tribe 'did not approve of a proposed campaign, it simply declined to march' (quoted in Gardiner 1994: 8). If the chiefs were killed then the army could evaporate. Their morale was unique, as an incident in Egypt in March 1941 shows. When a recruit shouted an expletive at Capt Tiwi Love during a route march, unable to find who said it himself Love asked his CSM and cousin WO B. Ropata to find out. Ropata replied 'Find him your bloody self. He was talking to you, not me' (quoted in Gardiner 1994: 46). Signaller Joe Broughton decided to accept the blame despite not having uttered the offensive words and Love, who realized this was the case, made him step back in line and the march resumed.

Germany

Motorcycle battalions – and more so reconnaissance battalions – had a combination of scouting forces, heavy weapons and signals elements that allowed them to operate independently. The battalion commander with signals support and the commander of the *schwere Kompanie* would be just behind the advance guard. The battalion commander had a wide range of communication equipment available. In April 1941 the *HQ-Kompanie* (KStN 1109 issued in October 1937 and revised in February 1941) had six officers and 72 men with 17 wheeled vehicles, four sidecars, four motorcycles organized into a command element, combat, rations, baggage and maintenance trains; the signal detachment comprised two telephone sections, two backpack radio sections and

two SdKfz 261 armoured radio cars. With this amount of signals equipment the battalion commander could form the basis of a larger *Kampfgruppe* with heavier weapons to conduct not just tactical reconnaissance but also effective battlefield reconnaissance.

Auftragstaktik encouraged leaders to deal with tactical problems with the resources available and their training taught them to carry out mission command effectively. Also, they were made familiar with the temporary subordination of various units within ad hoc battle groups. They needed to know their limitations, as armoured cars as well as motorcycles could be exposed to enemy machine-gun fire that could easily destroy their tyres. Their dilemma was how far to push and when to call on help. To command his platoon, the *Zug* commander did not ride in a sidecar; instead he was carried in a Kfz 11 light half-track utility vehicle. Orders from further up the command chain were succinct and stipulated intent with a good deal of latitude as to execution.



The two backpack radio sections in *HQ-Kompanie* had in total four *Feldfu b* backpack radios that had a range of 1,300yd to distribute to the other *Kompanien* as and when required. An extension aerial could be fitted in static locations and this gave a greater range. Their reliability was an issue and as well as motorcycle couriers, the battalion commander had two SdKfz 261 armoured radio cars available. Here, a radio from Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 is deployed in the field in Poland in 1939. (Author's Collection)

The Germans wanted commanders to keep close to the front line and position themselves where they could intervene in the battle. Short and clear verbal orders were encouraged in all situations and everything was

subordinated to completing the mission. At Platamon, for example, Oberst Hermann Balck, the *Kampfgruppe* commander, was at the forefront and could issue orders that were relevant to the events as they happened on the battlefield.

In Poland and France, command-and-control procedures were tested to the full. While *Kampfgruppen* were formed according to battlefield requirements, there was still a tendency to base them around either infantry or tanks. Such groupings could be imbalanced and as a result could be vulnerable in situations that suited one arm more than the other. *Kradschützen* were in a better position than *Schützen* because they could frequently access tank support as they could keep up with a tank-based *Kampfgruppe*; furthermore, when working with an *Aufklärungs-Abteilung* the *Kradschützen* benefited from the balanced structure of the reconnaissance unit, but their combined forces were no match for an enemy tank unit and only mobility and quick reaction to the presence of such forces enabled the *Kradschützen* to cope. The test in Greece was of a different kind and enemy tanks were not such a potent threat. Rather, the ability to apply military force in mountainous terrain at a decisive juncture was what mattered, and while tanks did on occasion provide direct fire support when artillery was out of range, the Germans placed more reliance upon specialist troops in the form of *Gebirgsjäger* to outmanoeuvre the enemy.



As effective reconnaissance required leaders at all levels to make assessments of terrain and enemy intent in an unfamiliar environment, they had to be particularly proficient and resourceful. Map reading was an essential skill for all ranks. Here, in the Soviet Union during June 1941, *Kradschützen* try to make sense of their whereabouts. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-216-0447-03A / Foto: Dieck)

Servia

14–15 April 1941

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

On 6 April 1941 the German invasion of Greece commenced; 9. Panzer-Division was soon in Skopje (Macedonia) heading for the Monastir Gap and 2. Panzer-Division was pushing into the Strumitsa Valley, while XVIII. Gebirgskorps also launched a frontal attack on Greek positions in the mountains north of Salonika.

On 8 April Lt-Gen Wilson ordered 4 NZ Bde and 6 NZ Bde to move from their positions north of Katerini back to the Olympus–Aliakmon Line and ‘nearly a month’s work and a large proportion of our wire and mines ... went by the board’ (Freyberg, quoted in Pugsley 2014: 75). For 19 NZ Bn and the rest of 4 NZ Bde a march in the dark commenced early on 9 April, and in heavy rain they were transported by truck 90 miles to the pass at Servia and placed under command of 6th Australian Division. In rain, sleet and snow they set up tents in the hard, rocky and open cliffs that towered over the pass. 19 NZ Bn was ordered to ‘hold the road junction and the mouth of the Pass. Wellington [A] Coy, Right, astride Servia Rd. Taranaki [D] Coy, Centre. Hawke’s Bay [C] Coy, Left. Wellington West Coast [B] Coy, in reserve with one platoon on hill 852’ (Sinclair 1954: 70). Taranaki Coy (D Coy) was moved forward to the heights above Prosilion once 20 NZ Bn moved into position on the flank. 18 NZ Bn was in positions on hills to the south of the village. 19 Aust Bde was further west having retreated from the Kleidi Pass and had 26 NZ Bn under command from 13 April. 16 Aust Bde, retreating across the mountains from Veria, was further east.

Substantial heavy weapons were available to the New Zealanders. Deploying 2-pdr anti-tank guns, 31 AT Bty RNZA (less one troop) had two troops with 19 NZ Bn and a third on the Elasson road in the rear. A platoon from 2/1 Aust MG Bn was sited with Hawke’s Bay Coy (another platoon was with 20 NZ Bn and another company in corps reserve). Lt-Col Weir, CO 6 Fd Regt RNZA and the overall artillery commander, sited his 25-pdr guns behind the pass; one battery was to give dedicated support to 19 NZ Bn and another to 18 NZ Bn. 7 Med

Regt RA (less one battery) with 4.5in guns was also on hand, as was a troop of 6in howitzers. Weir ordered eight British guns to target the bridge and the northern entrance to Servia.



This photograph, taken during the German move towards the Greek border, shows the tactical symbol on sidecars belonging to Kradschützen-Bataillon 59; in the background is a Kfz vehicle – probably a Kfz 15. Macedonia was full of mountain passes but there were few Yugoslavian forces to defend them. The Yugoslavian Army was slow to mobilize, had not prioritized this area for its defence and could not reposition units in time because of poor communication networks in the area.
(Author's Collection)

South of the river, three anti-tank ditches were prepared between two streams and a section from 6 Fd Coy RNZE laid mines in one of them. Pre-World War I trenches dug by the Greeks overlooking the pass were occupied by Hawke's Bay Coy (C Coy) and more mines were laid in front. A camouflaged pillbox was occupied near the rear anti-tank ditch by 16 Plt, Taranaki Coy (D Coy). A bridge over a small stream forward of the anti-tank ditches was also destroyed. Wellington Coy (A Coy) was deployed with 7 Plt and 8 Plt either side of the road behind the first anti-tank ditch and 9 Plt forward on the slope above the

road on the right flank. HQ Coy (deploying platoons numbered 1–6) was situated in the hills on the right closer to 18 NZ Bn positions with the exception of 4 Plt (the carrier platoon), initially placed out in front closer to the river.

Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, having motored through Yugoslavia, appeared at Florina on 10 April. Following the German capture of Vevi from a predominantly Australian force on 12 April, a mobile force from 9. Panzer-Division under Oberst Theodor von Sponeck was ordered by General der Kavallerie Georg Stumme to ‘follow hard on the enemy’s heels and give him no time to prepare any organised resistance’ (9. PzDiv War Diary, quoted in AWM 54: 5). Sponeck’s *Kampfgruppe* was primarily composed of Schützen-Regiment 11 (less 7./SR 11) plus 1./KBtl 59, 3./KBtl 59, III./AR 102, 3./PzJgAbt 50, one *Zug* from Panzer-Regiment 33 and 3./PiBtl 86.



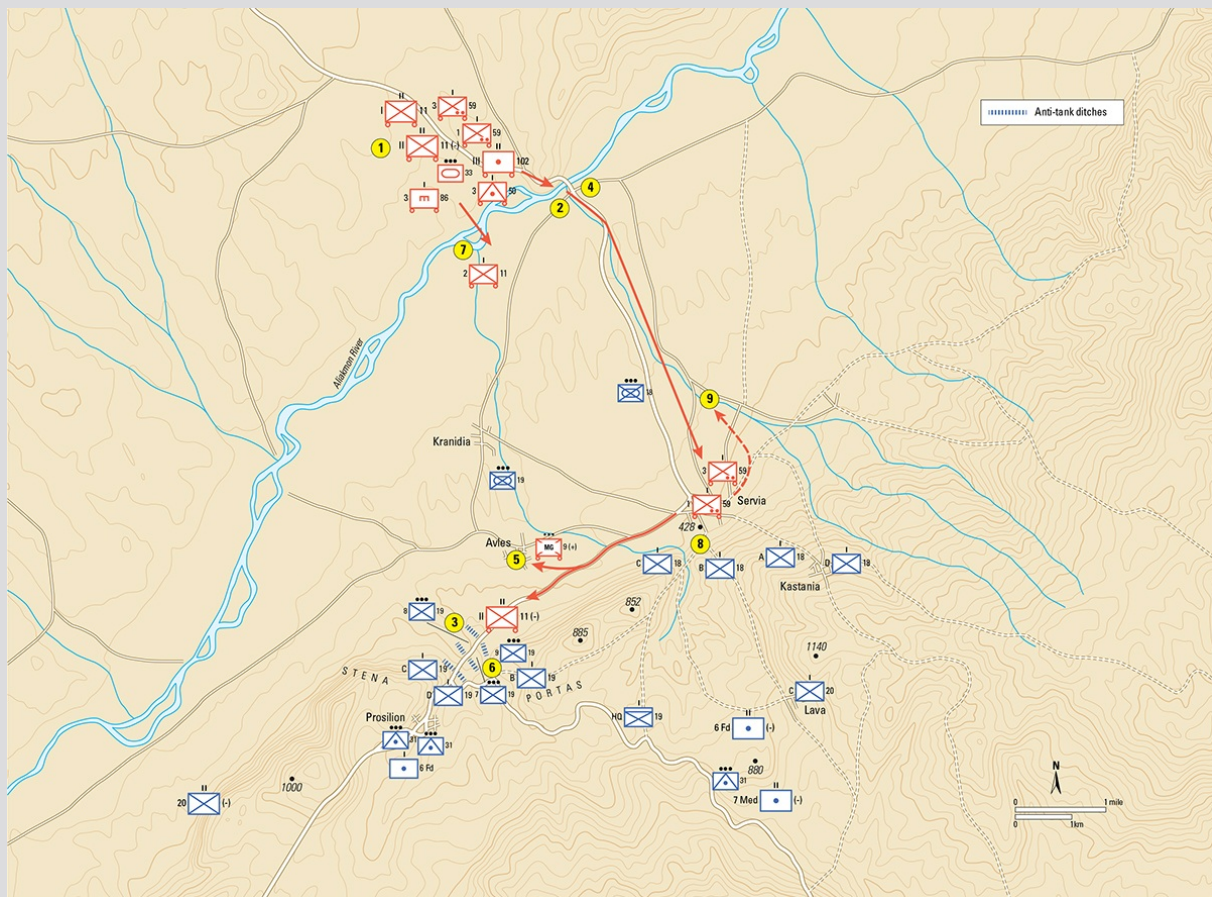
The move through Macedonia enabled the Germans to turn the Allied positions on the Aliakmon. Owing to poor intelligence, initially Generalfeldmarschall List did not see the Monastir Gap as the main effort, but on 9 April he realized its importance and asked for reinforcements in the form of 5. Panzer-Division from 1. Panzer-Gruppe. He thought, wrongly, that 7th Australian Division and 2nd Armoured Division as well as 2nd NZ Division and 6th Australian Division were in Greece. Here,

Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 can be seen moving through Schipka Pass in Bulgaria prior to moving through Macedonia. (Author's Collection)

At 1930hrs on 12 April patrols from Kradschützen-Bataillon 59 encountered 1st Rangers with tanks set up behind a ridge in front of Sotir between a lake and marshes; the following morning the *Kradschützen* crossed a stream, but were discouraged from making further progress when British tanks appeared in hull-down positions on the crest and fired into the gullies the Germans were trying to infiltrate. At 1000hrs on 13 April the British pulled out and took up a similar position at Ptolemais. 1st Rangers again blocked the *Kradschützen* and German tanks, instead of supporting the infantry, were sent on a wide flanking move through swampy terrain. The tanks exited the bog and ran into HQ 1 Armd Bde before halting for the night for want of fuel and ammunition. This was the only tank-vs-tank engagement of the campaign.

Oberstleutnant Reinisch's II./SR 11, blocked by traffic, could not reach Ptolemais on 13 April. At 0930hrs the following morning, when Kozani was reported clear, Sponeck had his *Schützen* out in front, ordering Oberleutnant Hoffmann's 8./SR 11 to capture the Aliakmon Bridge 'if opposition was weak'; it was soon reported that 'this bridge was destroyed, but there was no sign of any opposition to speak of on the SE bank of the river' (Sponeck, quoted in AWM 54: 10). Stumme had ordered Sponeck to 'force the river crossing north of Servia' and send 'a fast mobile force to capture Stena Portas [Portas Pass] and keep the pass open. The general situation indicated that he [the enemy] was moving back, and it was expected that a swift assault, even by a small force, would capture this important pass' (Sponeck, quoted in AWM 54: 10). As motorcycles could not be used to cross the river, Sponeck chose 6./SR 11 and 8./SR 11 to occupy the top of the pass, while 'Two MC [Motorcycle] companies [1./KBtl 59 and 3./KBtl 59] under regimental command will follow up with the task of climbing the hills south of Servia and opening the pass from the rear' (Sponeck, quoted in AWM 54: 10). In theory, the two tasks could be done by either force and the *Kradschützen* would soon be grateful for their assignment.

18 NZ Bn and KBtl 59 at Servia, 14–15 April 1941



MAP KEY

- 1 1700hrs, 14 April:** Kampfgruppe *Sponeck* approaches down the road from Kozani. Oberstleutnant Reinisch's 6. and 8./SR 11 are ordered forward to capture the Aliakmon Bridge.
- 2 1830hrs, 14 April:** Led by Oberleutnant Hoffmann, 6./SR 11 and 8./SR 11 cross the Aliakmon and at 0200hrs pass by Servia on their way to Stena Portas Pass.
- 3 0530hrs, 15 April:** Thinking Greek soldiers are approaching their positions, personnel of 19 NZ Bn wave Hoffmann's men through the first anti-tank ditch. The leading Germans reach a cutting before the second anti-tank ditch and firing starts. 19 NZ Bn's 7 Plt, in the first anti-tank ditch, is attacked from behind but holds its position in close combat.
- 4 0600hrs, 15 April:** Reinisch orders 1./KBtl 59 and 3./KBtl 59 to move through Servia and open up the pass from the southeast. Only at 0800hrs does 1./KBtl 59 cross the Aliakmon, followed by 3./KBtl 59 at 0930hrs.
- 5 c.0600hrs, 15 April:** Leutnant Behrends and elements of 9./SR 11 cross the Aliakmon in an attempt to join up with Hoffmann, but Behrends' men are forced to withdraw on their way to the pass.

6 Dawn, 15 April: The Germans in the cutting set up a 5cm mortar, but it is silenced by 8 Plt's 2in mortar. 9 Plt targets the cutting with a 3in mortar. By 0700hrs, serious combat has ceased and at 0715hrs 70 German prisoners are sent back.

7 1100hrs, 15 April: Along with 2./SR 11, Sponeck swims across the river near Kranidia; the Germans are repulsed as they attempt to move on the pass.

8 1130hrs, 15 April: C Coy and B Coy, 18 NZ Bn fire at troops that are approaching Servia. 1./KBtl 59 is able to set up positions in the village, but 3./KBtl 59, following behind, is caught in the open north of Servia and is forced to ground.

9 c.1700hrs, 15 April: 1./KBtl 59 withdraws from Servia and, with 3./KBtl 59 and elements of I./SR 11, spends the night 1.25 miles north of the village.

Battlefield environment

Beyond Kozani, the road through the Monastir Gap veered south-east and crossed the Aliakmon River. In the valley were small areas of cultivation and a few stunted shrubs and trees. South of the river 'West of SERVIA a narrow precipitous rocky ridge 2600 ft high and almost unscalable on the northern side, extended for 4,500 yds towards PROSILION'; the road ran at the foot of this ridge and gradually climbed to the Stena Portas Pass – 500yd narrowing to 20yd – where it was 'well graded, but exceedingly tortuous and steep in places' (Puttick 1941: 1). The hills were devoid of trees or shrubs. Here, 19 NZ Bn was positioned with 18 NZ Bn on the ridge further east where 'Access to KASTANIA and to the country South of SERVIA was by very steep and tortuous bridle and foot track from SERVIA and LAVA' (Puttick 1941: 1).

Major Schmalz, commander of Kradschützen-Bataillon 59, described the defensive strengths of the Servia position: the heights 'rise up almost vertically whilst to the northeast of Servia the terrain is flat, undulating and criss-crossed by little vegetation and few ditches ... Dug in in caverns and trenches and not to be attacked by bombs or artillery fire effectively, the defenders command the area from above and the foreground down to the river'; furthermore, because of the distance from the river to Servia, the lack of cover and the blown-up bridge, 'Support by the heavy weapons for the attack is not an option' (Schmalz, quoted in BAMA RH 39/699: 2).



When 18 NZ Bn arrived at Servia, C Coy and B Coy followed a steep slippery track over ravines and across slopes of loose shingle. C Coy was perched immediately above Servia and had a platoon on a spur close to 19 NZ Bn, while B Coy was south-east of Servia. The other companies went to Kastania on the right. Pte V. Ball described 'very cold nights ... very hard going ... getting tired as hell' (quoted in Stockings & Hancock 2013: 215–16). The brigade front once 20 NZ Bn was brought forward increased from 6,200yd to 16,700yd, but 9,500yd of this was thought to be practically unclimbable. Here is a view of Servia from an artillery observation post on the hills above the village.
(Australian War Memorial 134871)

INTO COMBAT

At 1830hrs on 14 April, 6./SR 11 and 8./SR 11 crossed the Aliakmon River 'by clambering across the pillars of the blown bridge' (Sponeck, quoted in AWM 54: 11). The engineer bridging column was ordered up, as was artillery to fire in support of the bridging operation. Hoffmann had a *Gruppe* from 8./SR 11 under Leutnant Wohlrabe out front, followed by 1. Zug, 3. Zug, the sMG-Gruppe (less one gun knocked out by shellfire that day), an 8cm *Granatwerfer-Gruppe* from 9./SR 11, and 2. Zug. There was no enemy artillery fire and the advance proceeded smoothly. At 0100hrs on 15 April, Hoffmann received an order via radio from Reinisch to keep Oberleutnant Dörfler's 6./SR 11 behind. If a battle occurred 6./SR 11 would deploy into line. Wohlrabe reported Servia clear at 0200hrs.

Leutnant Freier's *Zug* from 6./SR 11 took over as lead unit and encountered a destroyed road bridge 1 mile out of Servia that 'was easily passed by wading the stream' (Hoffmann, quoted in AWM 54: 13). Half a mile before the pass Freier captured two Greeks on horses. Then he 'crossed an A Tk [anti-tank] ditch which ran from the rocky hillside obliquely cross the road and country beside it'; the ditch was partly broken in and the defile was reportedly only 90–110yd away – 'a narrow pass whose rocky walls came close to the road on both sides' (Hoffmann, quoted in AWM 54: 13).



Sunday 13 April dawned bright and clear on Servia. That evening, an air raid by 17 *Stukas* caused three Allied casualties. 4 NZ Bde stipulated that there was to be 'No AA LMG or SA fire at aircraft unless obviously discovered and targeted' and described these attacks as 'spectacular and impressive but singularly ineffective' (Puttick 1941: 2). Here, presumably against orders, a Bren-gunner from 18 NZ Bn fires at a German dive-bomber. The *Luftwaffe* tried to interdict the Allied retreat in Greece but had poor results, and the importance of air power to driving out the Allies would be overstated by those who sought to justify the campaign. Rather, German pilots operating from overcrowded airfields were restricted by the mountains to inaccurate medium altitude bombing, and they refused to bomb at night. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-13571)

At 0530hrs, New Zealand sentries from 7 Plt behind the first anti-tank ditch heard Greek voices. They waved on personnel they thought were 50 Greek soldiers but who were actually German. When the Germans reached the cover of a cutting before the second anti-tank ditch, the New Zealanders discovered their error and firing started. 8 Section from 9 Plt, positioned at an angle to the other platoons, opened up from high ground above the obstacle. Hawke's Bay Coy and the Australian machine guns also joined in. German support weapons in and around the first anti-tank ditch returned fire. The Bren gun from 9 Plt's 7 Section brought enfilade fire to bear on them. German machine-gun fire caused three casualties before it was stopped by Pte McGregor, 7 Section's Bren-gunner, with tracer rounds.



The British 1 Armd Bde deployed forward in March to cover the initial Allied deployments. Its tanks suffered particularly heavily from mechanical breakdown. On 13 April at Ptolemais, 21 were set on fire by the British because they had broken down. Here, *Kradschützen* inspect a British Cruiser Mk II (A10) tank in Greece. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-161-0317-26 / Foto: Bauer)

Wohlrabe reported that two *Züge* (Leutnant Freier and Leutnant Vagt) had passed through the first anti-tank ditch when shots rang out. Hoffmann ordered Leutnant Hesse to try to move his *Zug* in the ditch to heights overlooking the defile, and sent a runner forward to Vagt to instruct him to occupy positions on the right. Hoffmann described how fire from the hills either side of the defile including from machine guns targeted those in the ditch, and how hand grenades were thrown down onto the Germans. The attackers were at a severe disadvantage as the moon illuminated the road and country either side, but although the hills ‘were in total darkness’, German troops near Hoffmann in the ditch ‘immediately opened small arms and MG fire on the enemy weapons, which could be located among the dark hills by their muzzle flashes’ (Hoffmann, quoted in AWM 54: 13).

German troops in the cutting between the first and second anti-tank ditches attacked 7 Plt near the first ditch from behind. A German officer leading the

way cut down three soldiers, but Pte McKay killed him and two of his men with a grenade. Pte Jim Frain with a Thompson submachine gun stopped another party of 20 Germans approaching his trench from behind. 8 Plt was also under fire from the rear and some Germans were dealt with by Pte Wellman with another Tommy gun.



BMW and Zündapp produced motorcycles specifically for military use, but those built by other companies for civilian use were also used by the military. In April 1941, BMW's R12, produced at the factory in Eisenach from 1935, equipped many *Kradschützen* units. With shock absorbers protected against the elements and a top speed of 68mph, the R12 had a simplified layout to permit ease of maintenance in the field, and a resilient frame. That year the R75 would replace the R12; the R75

had the sidecar permanently attached via an axle to the rear wheel of the motorcycle, which helped in adverse environments as it effectively gave the machine a two-wheel-drive capability. (Author's Collection)

Hoffmann could not report the situation because his wireless had been destroyed by enemy fire. Wounded started arriving and 'the situation of the troops in the ditch was untameable, as the ditch was exposed to heavy flanking fire' (Hoffmann, quoted in AWM 54: 13). He heard loud noises further forward that died down with the dawn. With daybreak at c.0640hrs, Hoffmann's men in the first anti-tank ditch could be seen by 9 Plt and a 3in mortar began firing at them. Opposite 8 Plt the ditch curved and dipped out of sight of 9 Plt and here the Germans set up a 5cm mortar, but it was soon destroyed by 8 Plt's 2in mortar, manned by Pte Erskine and Pte Salmon. Hoffmann crawled to a hill on the right of the road, encountering dead and wounded, and at 0800hrs withdrew to Alves and then back to the river to report.

At 0530hrs, II/SR 11, despite losing communication with the forward troops, reported the operation in the pass as proceeding according to plan and sought to provide support to the forward troops. Leutnant Behrends was ordered up with a *Maschinengewehr-Zug* and a *Granatwerfer-Gruppe* from 9/SR 11. At dawn he crossed the river on engineer pontoons and thought Servia was clear before pushing on to the pass. He went on alone to find out where Hoffmann wanted his weapons because his men carrying them were making slow progress. Behrends observed New Zealand troops (probably from 18 NZ Bn) moving down a trench on a ridge overlooking the road. They opened fire on his men who set up their mortars and returned fire. New Zealand mortars replied and forced Behrends' men to retire to Alves, where Behrends dashed back to re-assume command. He withdrew with four wounded and one machine gun lost.

At 0600hrs, Reinisch ordered the *Kradschützen* to support Hoffmann in the pass by advancing through Servia on Lava and then following paths south. Oberleutnant Schröfl, commanding 1./KBtl 59, along with 3./KBtl 59 (minus two *Gruppen* assigned to battalion HQ) was already reconnoitring options to cross the Aliakmon River. Schröfl had requested an artillery observer and radio to accompany the attack, but neither turned up and he went on without communication with Reinisch. At 0630hrs the *Kradschützen* advanced to the destroyed Aliakmon Bridge. Leutnant Ellfeldt reported 'no ford with less than 1.5 metres [5ft] depth available' (Schmalz, quoted in BA MA RH 39/699: 1). Some planks that were used were no good as the river was swollen. Allied artillery fire also slowed the advance; even so, 1./KBtl 59 crossed at 0800hrs, followed by 3./KBtl 59 at 0930hrs.

With the advent of morning, Sponeck realized that the engineers had failed to build a crossing. Generalleutnant Alfred Ritter von Hubicki, commanding 9. Panzer-Division, observed the site. At 0900hrs I./SR 11 was ordered to cross upstream at Kranidia (which was further away from Servia) to assist II./SR 11, but the attempt was abandoned due to heavy artillery fire. Hoffmann then arrived and explained what had occurred to 6./SR 11 and 8./SR 11. Sponeck could only ponder the fate of the *Kradschützen* at Servia because the signals section allotted them from the regimental *Nachrichten-Zug* was absent and heavy fire prevented runners from reaching them. Observation was difficult because 'all the spurs ran right up at right angles to the mountains' (Sponeck, quoted in AWM 54: 12). At 1100hrs, along with 2./SR 11, Sponeck swam across the river. This *Kompanie* attempted to advance towards the pass but was quickly repulsed, with 20–30 killed. Sponeck had to swap positions frequently because an artillery battery was targeting any movement. At 1600hrs he told Reinisch to locate the *Kradschützen*. Leutnant Zubrzycki was instructed to find out what had happened to them.



Here, Allied trucks cross the Aliakmon at Servia on 12 April. The bridge was demolished at 1520hrs on 13 April, but 'the charge did not have enough power on its own to twist the bridge on its side' (2/1st Fd Coy report, quoted in Ewer 2008: 149); the girders were down, however, and tanks could not use the bridge. At 1200hrs on 14 April Bren-gun carriers observed German soldiers approaching the site. Anzac Corps HQ had not initially agreed to have defensive positions close to the bridge and only artillery targeted the Germans as they crossed. (Australian War Memorial 007827)

That morning, Schröfl had ordered a reconnaissance of Servia and the setting up of an 8cm mortar from 4./SR 11 under Gefreiter Kopany in support. At 1130hrs, C Coy and B Coy, 18 NZ Bn fired at approaching troops and CSM E. McCormack took a patrol into the village before the Germans entered and ambushed them as they went in. Schmalz reported how the leading *Zug* of 1./KBtl 59 was fired on but the bulk of the *Kompanie* 'reaches the covering houses at the run. 3 *Kompanie* remains under fire to the north of the town. The *Kompanien* have thus reached the defensive system of the Olympus position. 1 *Kompanie* captures district after district fighting in houses and in close

combat' (Schmalz, quoted in BA MA RH 39/699: 3). 1./KBtl 59 set up positions in the taller houses as the main roads were swept with fire. Schmalz described how 'The opposition in caverns and consolidated trench positions directly above the town greets every movement with violent well aimed fire. Meanwhile 3 Kompanie lying in plain sight and under the strongest artillery and machine gun fire fights its way forward by careful exploitation of the terrain' (Schmalz, quoted in BA MA RH 39/699: 3).



By 0700hrs on 15 April, serious combat at the pass had ceased and at 0715hrs 70 German prisoners were sent back. By 0800hrs the rest of the Germans were in retreat and another 50 prisoners were gathered. The Germans reported 33 killed, 71 wounded and 185 missing. New Zealand casualties were two dead and six wounded. Eric Davies, who served in 19 NZ Bn, reported the action: 'About 5.30 firing started, enemy machine-gun had advanced quite close. Eventually annihilated or captured. One company did good work, hell it was good. Troops advancing all morning ... Should I survive this I'll always remember our first day as front line troops' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 155). Here are German prisoners captured at Servia. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-01179-F)

Zubrzycki reported to Sponeck that 3./KBtl 59 was pinned down north of Servia. In fact by early evening its 3. Zug had reached Servia but, according to Schmalz, moving further forward was futile as heavy weapons were not available. Sponeck described how 3./KBtl 59 'could not bring its heavy weapons into position, as every movement was visible from the craggy hills nearby ... while the other company inside the village could move around with

a little more freedom' (quoted in AWM 54: 12). Only at 1700hrs when Leutnant Jahn arrived with a radio from Artillerie-Regiment 112 was artillery support an option. Sponeck received permission from Hubicki to withdraw from Servia to join up with the rest of I/SR 11, 1.25 miles north of Servia. That night the *Kradschützen* had to stay there because accurate artillery fire prevented them from pulling out further; supplies could only reach them at night, carried through the river at chest height. Thanks to their cautious approach 1./KBtl 59 had suffered only four dead and four wounded; 3./KBtl 59 one dead and three wounded. 1,550 rifle rounds, 5,650 machine-gun rounds, 5,300 submachine-gun rounds, 30 mortar bombs and three hand grenades were used.

Stumme wanted to launch another attack on the pass on 16 April, but was persuaded by Hubicki to call it off. Instead, Stumme ordered 5. Panzer-Division to turn the flank; it took two days of toil in the mountains, however, before the Panzers debouched on the plain at Kalabaka. On 18 April, 9. Panzer-Division was ordered 'to increase its patrolling by day and night to discover when the enemy begins to evacuate the Servia positions' (9. PzDiv War Diary, quoted in AWM 54: 16). That day, amid rain and mist, the division was able to advance through the pass because 4 NZ Bde had moved out the night before. Pte Anderson described how the New Zealanders had 'picked our way upstream and along the gorge ... Stuck to the stream for a further two miles and up over steep ridges so as to keep well out of view of the road, and the Hun, unaware of our retreat' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 92). 4 NZ Bde retreated through 6 NZ Bde at Elasson before moving towards the Thermopylae Line. Their route would be through Larissa and the race was to get there before 2. Panzer-Division, which was approaching down the coast east of Mount Olympus.



On 16 April, General der Kavallerie Georg Stumme ordered the Serbia position to be held down while 5. Panzer-Division pushed through Grevena to exploit gains made by *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* on the flank; the route was without roads and full of ravines, however, and though 1./KBtl 59 and 4./KBtl 59 reached the Aliakmon River at Lipsista, the bridge there was destroyed. A pontoon bridge was this time successfully built as the engineers were not under enemy fire. Here, 5. Panzer-Division engineers can be seen building a pontoon bridge on 23 April 1941. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1989-023-12 / Foto: o. Ang)



The M1928 Thompson submachine gun. Maj W. Cresswell, the doctor at the 19 NZ Bn regimental aid post, reported its first use by the battalion at Servia on 15 April when the Germans suffered 'over 200 major and minor wounded'; he described 'a terrible weapon' that was responsible for 'shocking close range wounds ... This weapon proved very deadly at close range and became firm favourite with N.Z. Infantry' (Cresswell 1941: 1). (NRA Museums, NRAMuseums.com)

Platamon

15–16 April 1941

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

On 29 March 1941, 21 NZ Bn disembarked at Athens and was detached from 5 NZ Bde to guard military installations there – a role that led the battalion's personnel to refer themselves to as the 'Greek Home Guard'. In 21 NZ Bn the CO, Lt-Col Neil Lloyd 'Polly' Macky MC, was a solicitor who had risen from the ranks and was commodore of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Club. Macky, and Maj E.A. Harding MC, had served in the New Zealand Rifle Brigade during World War I. Capt R. McClymont, Capt C. Le Lievre, Capt W. Tongue and Capt A. Trousdale were the company commanders; Le Lievre and Trousdale were World War I veterans.



Oberstleutnant Hermann Balck, who had led the crossing of the Meuse River in May 1940, commanded the German forces at Platamon. He led from the front and dismissed complaints from the *Kradschützen* about their dismounted role. He redeployed his forces when needed and issued timely orders to exploit new opportunities. Promoted to *General der Panzertruppen* in 1944, he was one of 27 officers in the German armed forces awarded the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Swords and Diamonds. In September 1944 he commanded Heeresgruppe G in France. Here, on 16 April 1941, he is in his PzBefw III Ausf H command tank, with a prisoner riding on the back. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1994-009-17 / Foto: o. Ang)

On 8 April the New Zealanders entrained for Katerini, but at midday the following day their destination was altered to Platamon. There, D Coy, 26 NZ Bn was wiring a railway tunnel that ran between the slopes of Mount Olympus and the sea. The tunnel pierced a 200ft-high ridge half a mile from the sea that fell away steeply on both sides. There was a track alongside the railway line passable to vehicles that deviated from the line and crossed a saddle between Castle Hill and Hill 266 further inland before rejoining the line at the tunnel's southern exit. On Castle Hill was a 12th-century Byzantine castle that had a central stone tower, which made a good observation platform, and a towered gate and which was surrounded by a double stone wall. Lt A. Yeoman, a platoon commander in B Coy, 21 NZ Bn reported how although of solid

granite the positions dug around the castle by 26 NZ Bn 'were not particularly well placed. The pits were dug in dense scrub with no fields of fire' (Yeoman 1941: 1).

The aim was to prevent German armour from using this route south to Larissa. Hargest ordered Macky to prepare defences on the approaches to the railway tunnel, Castle Hill and Hill 226; he specified no withdrawal and told him to 'counter-attack should either be captured' and 'make provision for defence against landings from boats at least a mile in rear of your positions' (quoted in Woods 2012: 81). Macky positioned A Coy in weapon pits already dug on the forward slopes of Castle Hill, and B Coy on Hill 266. C Coy was deployed further west to hold Pandeimon, 'a steep ascent but wonderful view' (Yeoman 1941: 1), while D Coy was in reserve on the reverse slope of Castle Hill.

On 9 April, Lt F. Jones with 19 Army Troops Coy RNZE arrived from Katerini with a section of engineers. An anti-tank minefield was laid around the saddle track and craters were also created here, but a lack of explosives meant these were limited. Anti-tank guns were not provided as the brigade threat assessment discounted tanks and only one artillery troop – Lt L.G. Williams' A Tp, 27 Bty, 5 Fd Regt RNZA – was assigned to support the battalion, deployed 'Well back in a creek bed, fringed with willows, Excellent cover for the guns' (Yeoman 1941: 1).

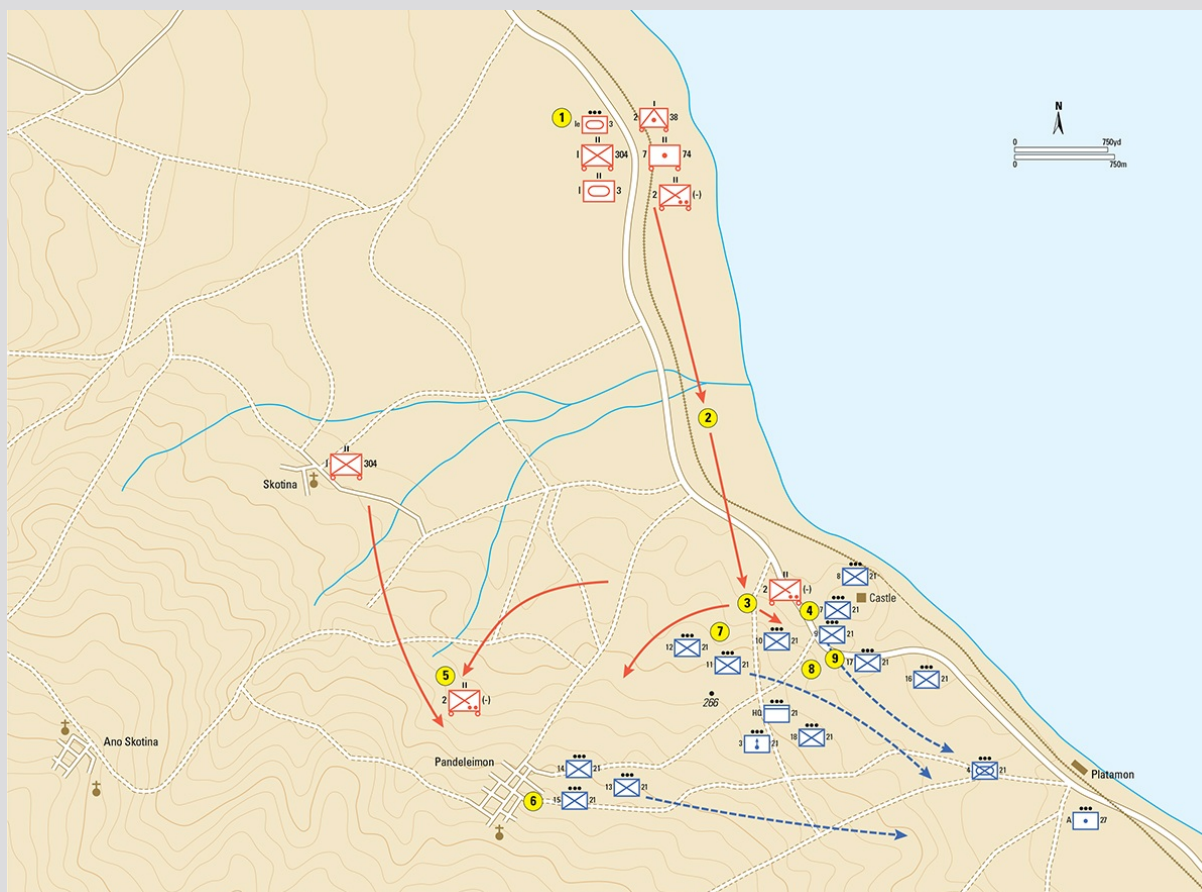
On 14 April, Freyberg met with Macky and told him not to worry about tanks and to hold his position at whatever cost because an Allied withdrawal to Thermopylae was planned. That evening Capt W. Tongue, OC C Coy, reported to Macky that at least 100 tanks were lined up on the plain; a message reporting 50 tanks and 150 other vehicles was sent by Macky, who then ordered Jones to destroy the tunnel. A 350lb charge placed in a bay failed to bring the roof down, although 50lb of explosives in the breach the charge had made brought down the lining.

Oberstleutnant Hermann Balck, who commanded Kampfgruppe 2 of 2. Panzer-Division, was ordered to 'defeat the enemy on the hills of Pandeimon and push on through Larissa through the Tempe Gorge [across the Pinios River] or further south' (2. PzDiv order, quoted in Woods 2012: 80). He wanted to break through to Larissa and prevent the Allies from withdrawing south through the road junction there. In the lead Balck had Kradschützen-Bataillon 2, followed by PzRgt 3's HQ and scout *Zug*, I./PzRgt 3, I./SR 304, 2./PzJgAbt 38 and 7./AR 74 (12 10.5cm and four 15cm guns).



On 9 April, 21 NZ Bn settled down around Platamon to build entrenchments. Donkeys were purchased with money from the soldiers to carry supplies up the hillsides, and 20 mules were also obtained. The nights were wet and cold. While the Germans would employ a combined-arms force, the defenders were denied this by their higher command, who were preoccupied with the perceived rather than actual threat. The soldier here also has a Thompson submachine gun. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-11862)

21 NZ Bn and Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 at Platamon, 15–16 April 1941



MAP KEY

- 1 13 April:** Kampfgruppe *Balck* begins advancing south from Katerini, tasked with breaking through on the coastal road towards Larissa.
- 2 14 April:** Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 deploys on the plain in front of Castle Hill and is targeted by mortars and 25-pdrs of A Tp, 27 Bty, 5 Fd Regt RNZA.
- 3 1000hrs, 15 April:** Three *Kompanien* of Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 attack A Coy and B Coy, 21 NZ Bn, deployed on Castle Hill and Hill 266. Two *Kompanien* are repulsed once they clear the scrub and another flanking *Kompanie* is pinned down when the Germans discover the New Zealand positions extend up to Pandeimon.
- 4 2000hrs, 15 April:** Five PzKpfw II light tanks accompanied by *Kradschützen* approach New Zealand positions with supporting fire from other tanks from I./PzRgt 3; all five break down at the foot of the castle and the German attack is repulsed.
- 5 Night, 15/16 April:** During the night, Stollbrock brings up Kradschützen-Bataillon 2's *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* and I./SR 304 undertakes a wider move further inland around Pandeimon.

6 Dawn, 16 April: With mortar and machine-gun support from Pandeimon, Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 advances on C Coy, 21 NZ Bn. Two sections from 15 Plt are overrun and I./SR 304 then enfilades D Coy's positions on the reverse slope.

7 c.0900hrs, 16 April: An attack by 50 tanks firing at Hill 266 and *Kradschützen* infiltrating on the flank prompts Capt C. Le Lievre to withdraw his B Coy to the rear of Hill 266. A Coy is holding firm on Castle Hill.

8 1015hrs, 16 April: Lt-Col N. Macky, CO 21 NZ Bn, radios 5 NZ Bde HQ that he is retreating. A Coy withdraws in good order. 18 Plt pins down the Germans in the scrub and allows B Coy to withdraw.

9 Midday, 16 April: German tanks are towed over the saddle and Hauptmann von Boxberg's *Panzer-Kompanie* heads towards the Pinios. Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 has suffered 25 per cent casualties and is replaced as leading unit.

Battlefield environment

Yeoman described Castle Hill as 'bare on top with a fringe of scrub lower down the slope' and Hill 266 as 'a high notable feature, in steep country, [with] dense scrub through which it was wise to use the tracks' (Yeoman 1941: 1). In between them was a saddle track. Further west from Hill 266, the ridge rose for 1 mile to Pandeimon village at 1,500ft. Tracks from here led to Larissa at the other end of the Pinios Gorge. Others went to Platamon station and joined the saddle track. These could be used to outflank 21 NZ Bn. No direct fire support was available to the Germans because the ground was not overlooked. According to Balck, artillery was 'doomed to be useless' (quoted in Woods 2012: 99) and tanks tried to compensate the following day; however, the slope was steep and difficult to negotiate. Craters on the forward slope and on the track on the reverse slope further hindered movement. 3. Panzer-Division's War Diary described how on 16 April: 'The tanks pressed forward along a narrow mule path. Many of them shed their tracks on the boulders or split their assemblies and finally the lead troop ran on to mines. Every tank became a casualty and completely blocked the path. A detour was attempted. Two more tanks stuck in a swamp and another blew up on a mine and was completely burned out. After strenuous exertions the track was cleared that evening while the engineers carried out a very successful sweep for mines' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 170). The PzKpfw II, being narrower, would have coped better, but there were none remaining in working order following the attack on 15 April.



The railway tunnel at Platamon was demolished and the Germans were not able to use it to go underneath the New Zealand positions. Once the railway line was cleared, the tanks could move along it towards the Pinios River, but the drivers needed all the skill they had to keep the vehicles in the middle of the tracks. Here, Platamon Castle is visible from the south as PzKpfw III medium tanks seek to make their way down the railway line. (Ullstein Bild/Topfoto)

INTO COMBAT

Oberstleutnant Carl Stollbrock deployed his Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 to attack at dawn on 15 April. An hour's artillery bombardment of the unoccupied castle and A Coy's ridge with high-explosive and smoke rounds caused few casualties among the New Zealanders, as the entrenchments were strong. Williams' A Tp replied, but did not have enough guns to make much of an impact. The *Kradschützen* attack – by three *Kompanien* – then commenced. As the leading *Kompanie* emerged from the scrub it suffered heavy casualties from intense small-arms fire from 200 men of A Coy and B Coy. Pte Perry Wouldes of B Coy described how the Germans 'didn't know what hit them as we opened fire for they just crumbled at the knees and didn't move ... As soon as we happened to see a bunch moving, we let them have it again' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 86). A *Kompanie* commander was killed by an improvised grenade thrown by Lt W. Southworth's 7 Plt – because the New Zealanders did not have any grenades, Southworth had acquired some sticks of dynamite from the engineers and persuaded them to fix safety fuses and detonators – and the *Kompanie* withdrew. A flanking *Kompanie* was pinned down when the Germans belatedly discovered the true nature and strength of the New Zealand positions, which extended up to Pandeileimon. Balck arrived in the early afternoon and ordered the *Kradschützen* to re-form and launch a wide envelopment around Pandeileimon. He called up his tanks to push through the centre. By 1800hrs one *Kompanie* of tanks were ready.



The coastal route was the shortest route to Larissa. Here is the view from the castle across the plain to the north; positions 11,000yd away could be seen. At 1820hrs on 14 April, Yeoman reported how 'motor cyclists 1500 yds away, dismounted and through glasses looked over our positions. Some one opened up with a Bren gun' (Yeoman 1941: 1). A stream of vehicles from *Kradschützen-Bataillon* 2 then deployed and was fired on by artillery to discourage their further approach. During the night of 14/15 April the Germans were fired on by four 25-pdr guns and two mortars. Yeoman reported how 'The mortar officer could reach them and had a wonderful time. All night he could be heard calling "up 50" or "down 100" and so on. Some trucks were set alight and we could hear the shouts and screams of the Germans' (Yeoman 1941: 1). (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-11847-F)

That evening, Stollbrock sent a *Kompanie* behind C Coy and attacked frontally with two more. At 1900hrs, C Coy reported that an attack from Pandeimon had pushed back 14 Plt. In the centre, opposite Castle Hill, the New Zealanders heard tanks crashing about, trying to make their way up the ridge through the smoke. At 2000hrs, five PzKpfw II light tanks of Panzer-Regiment 3's scout *Zug* accompanied by *Kradschützen* approached, with supporting fire provided by tanks of I./PzRgt 3. The German infantry did not

manage to clear the scrub, and two PzKpfw II turned back slightly short of 8 Plt; two more advancing on the saddle track halted beneath 9 Plt and another that momentarily got behind 10 Plt was forced to retreat because of the steep ridge. Mortars and Boys anti-tank rifles could not destroy them, but all five eventually broke their tracks and had to be abandoned. Yeoman told of the difficulties the Germans experienced: 'once they had to leave the scrub for the open top of the knoll they came under fire. The section posts of A Coy had an excellent field of fire. But enemy tanks forcing themselves through the foothills to the N[orth] and crashing through the scrub were able to keep hull down [to within 200–300yd]' (Yeoman 1941: 1). Panzer-Regiment 3 reported how the 'tanks attacking the ridge were forced by the fall of darkness and the terrible going to halt at the foot of the castle' (quoted in Cody 1953: 55). Macky disingenuously reported that it was 'difficult to prevent entry of tanks' and they had withdrawn because 'of our harassing fire' (quoted in Woods 2012: 88).



Panzer-Regiment 3 reported how on 16 April 'The whole regiment moved to the attack, co-operating with infantry and motor cyclists, who were directed to make an outflanking move to the right' (quoted

in AWM 54: 7). The railway line down the coast was an important route around Mount Olympus and, when the defensive positions were turned, sidecars – evident here – could slowly make their way along the tracks. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1979-123-28 / Foto: Jesse)

Shelling and sniper activity disturbed the night, but the Germans made no major attacks. B Coy was infiltrated and Capt Le Lievre decided to pull 11 Plt back behind 12 Plt. 14 Plt was also infiltrated as its sections were widely dispersed and Capt Tongue sent Lt Mervyn O'Neill with a patrol from his 13 Plt to assist. While O'Neill's patrol was en route, the Germans 'sprayed tracer bullets at random, put up flares, kept in touch by shouting and whistling – and finally disappeared over the ridge beyond Company Headquarters' (Cody 1953: 55). 14 Plt was found in one formed group and placed between 13 Plt and 15 Plt on the track. Yeoman reported that the 'Impression at the time was that they were trained night fighters' (Yeoman 1941: 1). Stollbrock brought up KBtl 2's *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* and I/SR 304 went wider on 'a night march of incredible difficulty across unknown ground covered with bush and boulders, and cut by deep gullies' (2. PzDiv War Diary, quoted in Ewer 2008: 169). The New Zealand artillery only had 80 rounds per gun and could not harass this movement; however, the proximity of the troops meant that German artillery was also not able to target the New Zealand positions either.



Kradschützen-Bataillon 55, belonging to 5. Panzer-Division, took over the pursuit to the Thermopylae position and encountered well-camouflaged machine-gun positions and roadblocks at Skamnos Pass. A night approach was followed by an attack at dawn on 24 April with Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bombing attacks replacing artillery support as the division's guns were out of range. The mortars of the *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* were effective and the village was captured by 1800hrs. A march by *Gebirgsjäger* around the flank also threatened to turn the Allied position – a situation frequently repeated in Greece and Crete. (Author's Collection)

At dawn on 16 April, Cpl Bert Howe's section from 15 Plt observed Germans (probably Stollbrock's men) departing Pandeileimon in four columns, not expecting opposition. Howe opened fire and the Germans scattered and formed up for an assault with machine-gun and mortar support. Howe was soon surrounded along with Cpl J. Gardner's section; Cpl D. Pipe's section was then overwhelmed from the west. O'Neill was sent up with a patrol from 13 Plt; Sgt Kibblewhite drew enemy fire and allowed O'Neill to enter 15 Plt positions, only to find them empty. Tongue also went forward to discover what had happened, and returned to find survivors at Coy HQ. Personnel of 14 Plt had also withdrawn there and they all made their way south down the ridge covered by 13 Plt. O'Neill caught them up, firing all the way at enemy positions. I/SR 304 then assisted the *Kradschützen* on the flank and enfiladed D Coy from Pandeileimon.

This was enough to persuade Capt Henry McElroy, 2IC C Coy, to ask Macky for permission to withdraw, but he did not receive an answer before the line went dead. Macky worried that C Coy was overrun as the telephone link was down, then observed the attack on his centre. An attack by 50 tanks firing at the ridge and infantry infiltrating on the flank made Capt Le Lievre withdraw 12 Plt behind 11 Plt positions in the rear of Hill 266. A Coy, though, was holding firm. The 25-pdrs prepared to engage tanks, but were nearly out of ammunition. Macky signalled Anzac Corps HQ a string of messages at 0920hrs, 0940hrs and 1005hrs, that Brig Sydney Rowell, Blamey's chief of staff, described as 'rather like a ball-to-ball description of a cricket match' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 175). At 0940hrs Macky radioed that a tank attack had started along the saddle track and that his position was serious. At 1015hrs his last message read: 'W/T Sta 21 NZ Bn closing down. Getting out' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 171). 3. PzDiv War Diary noted how 'The right hand company of tanks forced its way forward through the scrub and over the rocks and in spite of the steepness of the hillside got on to the top of the ridge. The country was a mass of wire obstacles and swarming with the enemy' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 170).

Allan Yeoman

Allan Yeoman was born in 1914 in Whakatane and was a dairy farmer before he enlisted in 1939, joining 21 NZ Bn. In April 1941, as a lieutenant, he commanded 11 Plt at Platamon. As a platoon commander, Yeoman was responsible for three rifle sections that each had a Bren gun. He also had an anti-tank rifle and a 2in mortar directly available, but his company commander was not able to offer him any other support weapons. Furthermore, his battalion commander had no heavy machine guns and the fire support of only two 3in mortars. In the defence Yeoman needed to make sure that his sections were deployed in mutually supporting entrenchments. He had to encourage his men to man their positions, direct the targets of those that he accompanied, and rally his men under fire. He also needed to ensure that there was a path of retreat if the enemy pressure was too great.

At Platamon, Yeoman's men were positioned to cover the western side of the slopes in front of Hill 266. They assisted in the ambush of the first attack on 15 April and then experienced another attack supported by PzKpfw III medium tanks that evening. That night the men of 11 Plt retained their positions in close proximity with the enemy; the following morning, with the overwhelming superiority of enemy numbers brought to bear, a New Zealand withdrawal was finally necessary and Yeoman successfully took his men to the rear of Hill 266.

On Crete, Yeoman was part of the counter-attack against Maleme airfield on 22 May. He was evacuated to Egypt and went on to command B Coy during Operation *Crusader* in Libya where he was wounded and made a prisoner of war on 26 November 1941. He made numerous escape attempts and from a camp in Austria eventually reached Yugoslavia where he fought for a time alongside the partisans. Recaptured on his way back to Italy, he narrowly avoided the firing squad and spent the rest of the war in a camp in Germany. He wrote about his escape attempts in 1991 and passed away in 2008.

Those German tanks that did reach the ridge were too late to hamper the withdrawal. Macky wanted to get out quickly and told the QM, Capt G. Panckhurst, to destroy the wireless and abandon telephone cable and entrenching tools. Balck stated that the New Zealand battalion also abandoned its heavy weapons (probably their two 3in mortars). A Coy pulled back in good order. 18 Plt pinned down the Germans in the scrub, allowing B Coy to withdraw. D Coy was only informed as Macky passed its positions. The Carrier Platoon covered the battalion move, as did a single 25-pdr gun. Lt Williams started to limber up his other guns. The field kitchen had prepared hot food, which remained, intended for New Zealand soldiers as they fell back; the Germans – short on supplies – were the beneficiaries, however. The Pioneer Platoon got the battalion across the Pinios River on the ferry and then sank it. The guns were also ferried across and B Echelon transport that crossed the railway bridge at Tempe was used to tow them further up the other side. Macky prepared to stop the German advance on Larissa the following day at the Pinios.

Carl Stollbrock

The commander of Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 from February 1939 was Oberstleutnant Carl Stollbrock. Born in 1897, he was commissioned in 1916 as an infantry officer before transferring to the cavalry in 1922 and in 1933 was promoted *Schwadron Chef*. He then joined a *Kraftfahr-Abteilung* in 1935. He was wounded in France in May 1940 and temporarily replaced for three months.

As battalion commander, Stollbrock sought to coordinate his different *Kompanien* and make sure that heavy weapons were where they were needed. He had to coordinate with other elements of the *Kampfgruppe* in order to carry out the overall mission and obtain support as and when required. In Greece his unit was at the forefront of the advance and he had to determine the *Schwerpunkt* (point of main effort) for his battalion. Stollbrock was firmly directed to take the coastal route to Larissa. Once the enemy were encountered in front of Platamon, he sought to deploy his battalion to seize what was a naturally strong defensive position. Intelligence about the opposition was lacking and, surprisingly, his men were reluctant to patrol to obtain clarity. He may have expected them to do so without his intervention. Enemy artillery fire may have discouraged night patrolling before the first main attack on 15 April. Once heavy resistance was encountered in front of Castle Hill and Hill 266, and the initial outflanking attack around these positions repulsed, he deployed the *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* further inland at Pandeleimon to support what was the decisive attack from that village on 16 April. He also obtained I./SR 304 and with this reinforcement there was no question the attack would not succeed.

In October 1941, Stollbrock was appointed commander of the NCO school for armoured reconnaissance troops at Sternberg, serving in this capacity until March 1944. In April 1944 he was made a regimental commander and then, as an *Oberst*, became commander of 2. Panzer-Division in April 1945. He passed away in 1984.

The Germans did not immediately pursue because broken-down tanks blocked the track over the ridge; however, gaps were blasted and tanks towed

over. During the morning of 17 April, because of the losses suffered by the *Kradschützen*, bicycle troops of one company of Auklärungs-Abteilung 112 (6. Gebirgs-Division) supported Hauptmann von Boxberg's *Panzer-Kompanie* which arrived at the Pinios late in the day. Leutnant Brunenbusch and Leutnant Schmitthemmer swam over the river and 'discovered a spot where it could to some extent be forded'; a PzKpfw II

drove determinedly down the high, steep embankment into the water. It struggled through the river like a walrus, with nothing showing except its turret; it appeared to be swimming. But the driver carried on calmly, although he was sitting up to his middle in water and the waves completely prevented him from seeing anything ... Surprisingly enough, the enemy had not fired, although he must have seen the crossing. (PzRgt 3 Report, quoted in AWM 54: 8)

Five out of seven tanks that tried the crossing were successful.

At the Pinios, 21 NZ Bn now defended another naturally strong defensive position, but would be defeated by a German force inferior to that encountered at Platamon. The Pinios Gorge had sheer walls on both sides of a fast-flowing river 30–40yd wide. There was a railway line on the north side with a bridge that was destroyed and a tunnel that was blocked, and at the eastern entrance a road on the south side that was cratered. Macky, ordered to the western end of the gorge, was told to 'deny the Gorge to the enemy till 19th April even if it meant extinction' (quoted in Ewer 2008: 177); however, he placed only a single platoon at the eastern entrance while C Coy and two platoons of B Coy defended the exit. D Coy was further up on the southern slopes but could not see into the gorge and was a long way from the northern slopes with no heavy machine guns to target that position. A Coy, in reserve behind the western exit, was unable to influence the battle. Platoon positions were deployed in depth but could be defeated in detail. A battalion of 16 Aust Bde – 2/2nd Aust Bn – guarded against an outflanking move further upstream.

During the morning of 18 April the *Radfahr-Schwadron* and Boxberg's *Panzer-Kompanie* advanced westwards on high ground along the northern side of the river; their fire occupied New Zealand defensive positions further up the opposite bank. Meanwhile the single New Zealand platoon guarding the crater in the road was soon withdrawn when targeted by a tank that had made its way along the railway line; after conducting an undisturbed river crossing in inflatable boats, 7./SR 304 filled in the crater. Although few in number, the Panzers that forded the river the previous evening were decisive as the anti-tank guns of L Tp, 7 AT Regt RNZA defended only the western end of the gorge. Sgt D. Cavanagh knocked out two, but without much infantry support his anti-tank gun and the three others were overwhelmed. PzRgt 3 reported

‘Our infantry were only 3 sections strong and not equipped to deal with this situation, but they did notable work ... and cleared out the enemy positions, under cover of the fire of the leading tanks’ (quoted in AWM 54: 9). 26 Bty, 4 Fd Regt RNZA was available to the defenders as well as A Tp, 5 Fd Regt RNZA, but the forward observer could not establish radio communication with the gunners because of the steepness of the gorge; also, the steep sides limited the ability of the guns to fire into the gorge and the crater could not be targeted. Mortars that could have achieved this had been abandoned at Platamon.



Led by its reconnaissance forces, 2. Panzer-Division entered Athens on 27 April, but by then the New Zealanders were well on their way to escaping from Greece (5 NZ Bde on 25 April, 4 NZ Bde on 27 April and 6 NZ Bde on 28 April). Here, *Kradschützen* are pictured driving through the city. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-164-0369-20A/ Foto: Jesse)



A German military convoy overtakes some Greeks on a rural track during the early stages of the German occupation of Greece, May 1941. (Photo by Keystone/Getty Images)

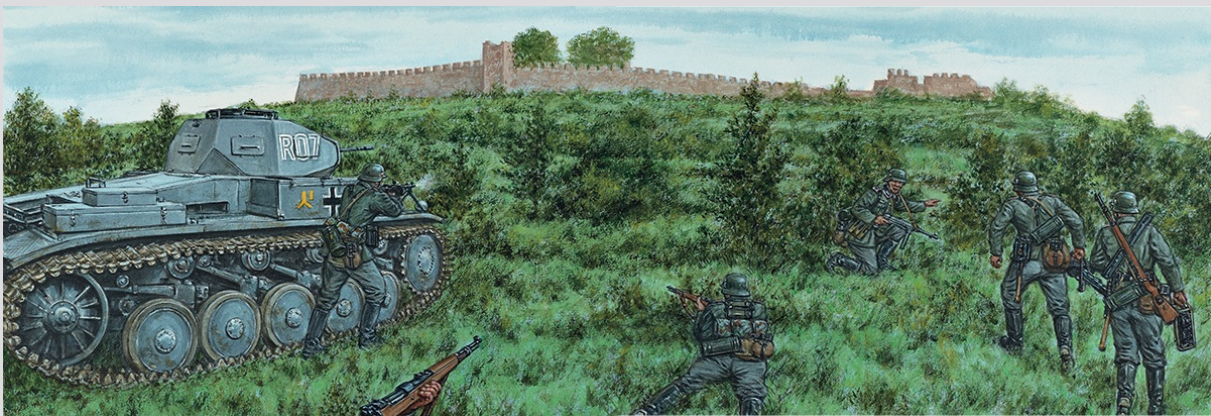
Macky was aware of the flanking movement conducted by *Gebirgsjäger* further upstream and that morning held a conference with company commanders and told them to withdraw to the coast rather than towards Larissa if cut off or overwhelmed. Although 21 NZ Bn suffered only four casualties, in the early afternoon company commanders started to withdraw. Although HQ Coy and A Coy still went down the road to Larissa, D Coy and the majority of C Coy plus parts of B Coy went over the hills to the coast to avoid German tank fire, where they sought boats to escape. 21 NZ Bn was decimated and on Crete Freyberg would have Macky replaced. Freyberg was greatly troubled and on 18 April went up the line to direct traffic. Still, the retreat through the town was completed before it could be captured and it would be *Gebirgsjäger* climbing over the mountain passes and crossing the Pinios further upstream rather than Balck's armoured forces that achieved this on 19 April. By then, however, the Australians and New Zealanders were established behind the Thermopylae Line. On 24 April, 5. Panzer-Division attacked with tanks

unsupported by infantry and was repulsed with heavy loss. The delay imposed upon the German pursuit enabled the New Zealanders to retreat to the embarkation beaches.

The assault on Castle Hill



New Zealand view: This scene depicts the moment at 2000hrs on 15 April when PzKpfw II light tanks belonging to Panzer-Regiment 3's scout *Zug* assaulted Castle Hill alongside *Kradschützen* from Stollbrock's *Kradschützen-Bataillon* 2. From weapon pits hewn out of the slope with explosives, New Zealand soldiers from A Coy are defending against the German assault. 8 Plt is not available as it is defending positions on the seaward side of the castle; however, 7 Plt and 9 Plt overlooked the track over the saddle with Coy HQ further up the slope. The German attack is not a surprise; following the defeat of the German attack earlier in the day the New Zealand soldiers are optimistic about their prospects, though the appearance of the tanks has preoccupied them. Two PzKpfw II can be seen ploughing through some scrub and are attempting to close on the New Zealand positions. A soldier is firing an anti-tank rifle at a PzKpfw II that is clearing the scrub 50yd away. A Bren-gunner is waiting for *Kradschützen* to appear from cover. Riflemen are training their weapons on the scrub.



German view: A German attack that morning had failed with heavy loss. The moment the *Kradschützen* had cleared the scrub they were met with heavy fire from A Coy and B Coy. Another attack has begun with tanks ordered forward by Oberst Balck. A PzKpfw II approached 8 Plt on the coast side of the castle but turned back because of the steepness of the hill. On the landward side, shown here, two more PzKpfw II are attempting to plough through the scrub in an attempt to force the saddle defended by 9 Plt between Castle Hill and Hill 266. The German soldiers are wary of clearing cover following their repulse that morning. The *Kradschützen* are trying to benefit from their abundance of machine guns to suppress the New Zealanders' fire, but do not have sufficient troops to close with their enemy. The *Zug* leader, equipped with a 9mm MP

38 submachine gun, is trying to encourage his men; a soldier equipped with a 7.92mm MG 34 general-purpose machine gun with drum magazines fitted is responding and is moving forward on the right while another MG 34 fires from behind a PzKpfw II.

Stilos to Sfakia

27–30 May 1941

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

As early as November 1940 British forces were sent to Crete, but little was done to prepare for a German invasion. Even so, in April 1941, Churchill – aware that Hitler would have to redeploy his forces for an invasion of the Soviet Union in June – thought defending Crete against an airborne attack would be a fine opportunity to kill German paratroopers. Those New Zealanders deposited on Crete by the Royal Navy had to stay put and dig in, much to Freyberg's chagrin and surprise.

Rather than using air power to lay siege to Crete, Hitler wanted a rapid solution and was persuaded that an airborne attack could be successful. When Freyberg heard the intelligence estimate of German forces on 30 April, he told the New Zealand Government the position was untenable. The logistical situation was parlous and German air supremacy would cut off Crete from maritime resupply. He assumed command of all forces on Crete; although the New Zealanders were already a brigade down as 6 NZ Bde was transported straight to Egypt, he had five Australian battalions, a British brigade and 11 largely untrained Greek battalions. As well as preparing to defend all the airfields, Freyberg also expected a seaborne invasion. 5 NZ Bde was tasked with defending Maleme airfield. 28 (Māori) Bn formed the brigade reserve and defended the Platanias River east of the airfield and the beach near that village.

The Māori had undergone their baptism of fire on 16 April in Greece, defending Skotina on the Mavroneri River in the Olympus Pass. A retreat to Thermopylae had followed. The detached Carrier Platoon was lost and the Mortar Platoon, also separated in the retreat, could not get away because its transport was sunk. Along with the Reinforcement Coy, they were captured in the Peloponnese. The rest of the battalion embarked on 24 April at Porto Rafti with four wireless sets, 28 Brens, a 3in mortar and many shovels. When 5 NZ Bde asked for a weapon return on Crete, the wireless sets went to Bde HQ and eight of the Brens to other units, as did the majority of the entrenching tools. The Māori did not appreciate being parted from their weapons. HQ Coy was

re-formed into an infantry company with three platoons, but retained its signals platoon and established another mortar platoon with three 3in mortars.



This group of Allied personnel captured during the fighting in Greece includes members of 28 (Māori) Bn. Their baptism of fire was at Skotina in the Olympus Pass, where fog reduced visibility and in the mist 16 Plt (D Coy) was overrun and captured; when the mist dispersed, however, B Coy blasted the enemy, who were making their way past a cliff along easier slopes. Hauptmann Költz, adjutant of I./SR 2, stated that 'the enemy was in fortified field positions with excellent camouflage, and fired only at close range at observed targets' (quoted in Cody 1956: 62). Then the Māori 'with all their arms, packs, and ammunition, marched across the mountainsides towards the pass road and safety' (quoted in Cody 1956: 64). RSM R. 'Ace' Wood wrote how 'The trip out was unmitigated Hell. Intensely dark, heavy rain and strong wind. Visibility absolutely nil. No stars for direction, compasses useless owing to windings of track. Grade was terrific, I should say 1 in 3 or 4. Speed was no more than 1 to 2 miles per hour' (quoted in Cody 1956: 65). Lt Ruhui Pene from A Coy wrote how they 'climbed this precipice packs and all by grabbing and clutching at trees and branches and hauling ourselves up foot by foot' (quoted in Gardiner 1994: 54). For those not captured it would be good practice for what they would experience on Crete. (Photo by ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

Lt-Col G. Dittmer, CO 28 (Māori) Bn, was a regular officer and World War

I veteran. His 2IC, Maj George Bertrand, was a part-Māori TA officer who had also seen service in World War I. Traditional elements in Māori society believed leadership depended on ancestry rather than personal characteristics and many officers were from notable families. Charles Bennett was commissioned; he and his brothers were told by their father, the Bishop of Aotearoa, that 'it was our duty to join up and fight for our country' (quoted in Pugsley 2014: 46).

On 20 May the initial German airborne landings by 7. Flieger-Division to capture the airfields were made and B Coy, 28 (Māori) Bn, sent to reinforce 22 NZ Bn at Maleme, mopped up 40 paratroopers before returning to battalion positions. On 21 May two *Kompanien* of paratroopers were dispersed once they landed on D Coy, and only in the early hours of 22 May did the battalion join with 20 NZ Bn in a belated attempt to recapture Maleme. The night attack started late and the airfield perimeter was only reached at 0730hrs. Capt Bell, OC A Coy, and Lt W. Porter were wounded. Capt Harding Leaf was killed while leading C Coy. The attack failed and 28 (Māori) Bn had to retreat across the Platanias River, having suffered 140 casualties. The Germans were now free to fly in reinforcements from 5. and 6. Gebirgs-Divisionen.



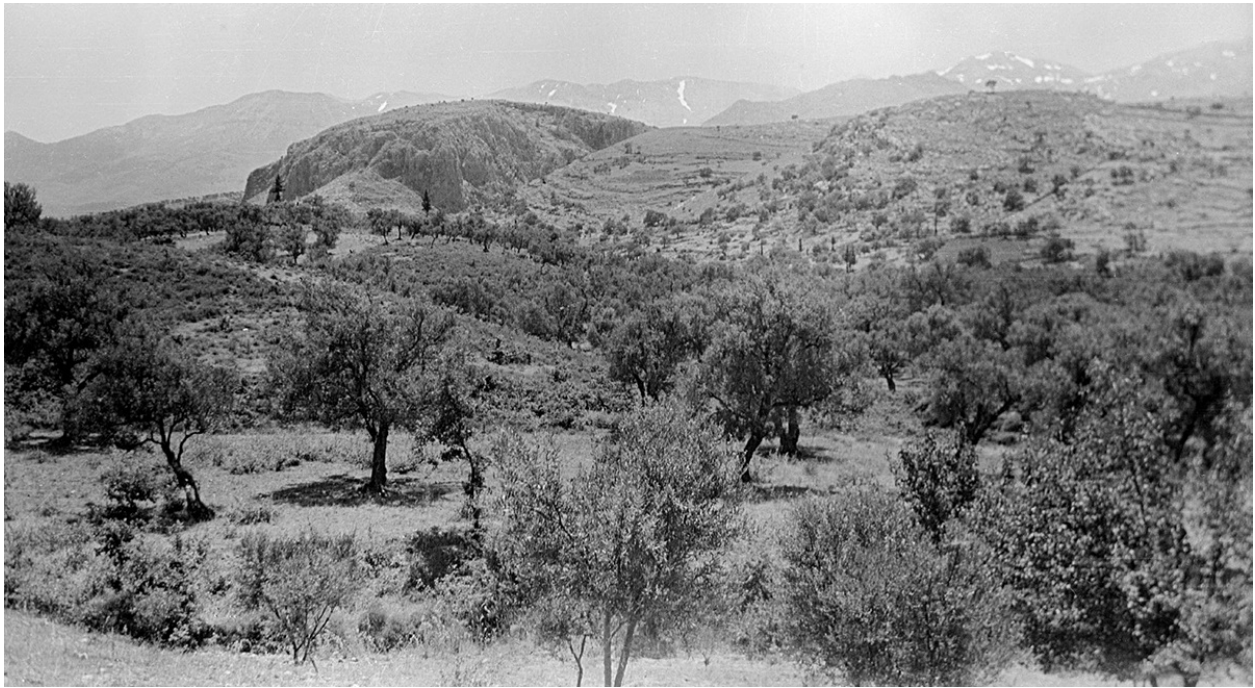
To supplement his advance guard, Oberstleutnant August Wittmann, commanding Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 95, was told to form a 'motorised battery of II/95 and a battery of parachute artillery for use in a special role' (DA 438.22/7: 57). Sidecars were not operated in large numbers by either *Gebirgsjäger* or *Fallschirmjäger* units, and 5. Panzer-Division was asked to provide Kradschützen-Bataillon 55 to the invasion force. *Fallschirmjäger* had some sidecars in their *Panzerjäger* and *Artillerie* units to transport guns. Here, a 3.7cm anti-tank gun from a *Fallschirmjäger* unit is being towed by a sidecar on Crete. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-2008-1201-500 / Foto: o. Ang)

Evacuation from Sfakia Bay on the south coast was soon incorporated in planning, but 5 NZ Bde could get no firm orders. Freyberg placed Maj-Gen E.C. Weston in charge of the forward troops, but A/Maj-Gen Edward Puttick, the new GOC 2nd NZ Division, decided to withdraw without telling Weston. There was no wireless communication between them. The brigade-sized British formation called Force Reserve, brought up by Weston to defend the coast road, was nearly destroyed on 27 May. Meanwhile, 28 (Māori) Bn arrived at 42nd Street, 2 miles from Suda Bay, before dawn on 27 May, and along with 21 NZ Bn and 19 NZ Bn on either flank, prepared a defensive line along the sunken road. At 0800hrs, Weston, who was not known to either 28 (Māori) Bn's Lt-Col Dittmer or Lt-Col J. Allen, the new CO 21 NZ Bn, met them both by accident, and 'informed the two O.Cs. that they were fools to stay where they were' (Dittmer, quoted in Davin 1953: 374–75).

Dittmer and Allen decided that if the enemy closed, they would charge. I./GJR 141 infiltrated through the olive groves and when the New Zealand positions were peppered by small-arms fire the order to charge was given. Capt F. Baker (having escaped Greece and been placed in charge of A Coy) described how Capt Rangi Royal's B Coy 'were forced to the ground where from the cover of trees, roots, and holes in the ground they commenced to exchange fire with the enemy' (quoted in Davin 1953: 377). A Coy moved through them 'and into the attack. At first the enemy held and could only be overcome by Tommy-gun, bayonet and rifle. His force was well dispersed and approximately 600 yards in depth ... They continued to put up a fierce resistance until we had penetrated some 250–300 yards. They then commenced to panic' (quoted in Davin 1953: 377–78). 19 NZ Bn and 21 NZ Bn, among others, were also part of the attack. The Māori counted 80 German dead. The Germans were temporarily on the defensive. Oberst Krakau's Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85, marching over the hills further inland, was now more of a threat to the Allied withdrawal.

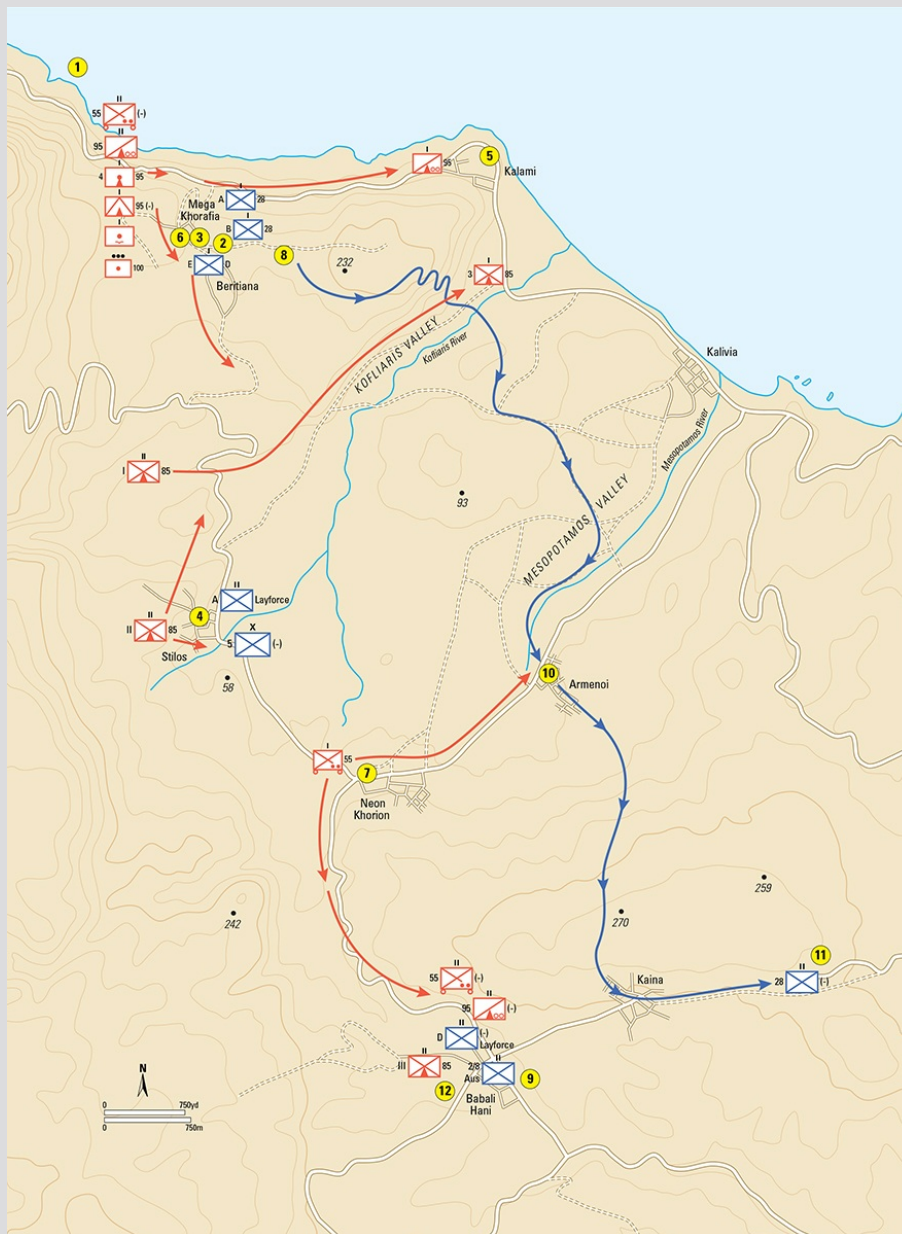


The German operational order for the invasion of Crete stipulated that *Kradschützen* would land at Iraklion and Rethimnon on 21 May. On 20 May, 2./KBtl 55 and the *schwere Kompanie* were loaded onto fishing vessels at Megara and Mylos. The convoy was engaged by British warships and destroyed on 21 May; the remnants reached Piraeus on 22 May. The other *Kompanien* would fly out of Lamia and Topolia and 3./KBtl 55 was the first to reach Maleme. On 26 May the rest of the battalion followed. Here, a sidecar is loaded onto a Ju 52/3m transport heading for Crete.
(Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-2005-0021 / Foto: o. Ang)



The terrain between Stilos and Neon Khorion is shown here in May 1941. While Churchill wanted Crete fortified, Wavell gave it a low priority. The logistical situation was parlous and providing the Germans could maintain sufficient air power in Greece, the long-term prospects for the Allied occupation of the island were grim because the sea routes to the main harbours – all situated on the northern shore – were vulnerable to air attack. Before the invasion roads from the handful of fishing ports on the south coast were not completed, a Cretan militia was not armed, alternative airfields to those on the northern coast were not built and the existing runways were not cratered to negate the effects of an airborne landing. (Australian War Memorial 131011)

28 (Ma-ori) Bn and Kradschützen-Bataillon 55, Stilos to Sfakia, 27–30 May 1941



MAP KEY

- 1** 1745hrs, 27 May: Kampfgruppe *Wittmann* is ordered to break through to Retimo and Iraklion.
- 2** Midnight, 27 May: 28 (Māori) Bn forms a rearguard north of Beritiana. Capt Rangī Royal, commanding A Coy and B Coy, deploys on heights overlooking the Stilos and coastal roads.

- 3 0500hrs, 28 May:** Ordered to defend the site of the destroyed road bridge on the Stilos road that is being prepared for demolition, the Spanish Platoon deserts. 2/Lt Te Pene is dispatched there with 11 Plt and 12 Plt, 28 (Māori) Bn.
- 4 0800hrs, 28 May:** Oberst Krakau's II./GJR 85 attacks Stilos, but is repulsed; at 1000hrs, Brig James Hargest, CO 5 NZ Bde, decides to withdraw during the day rather than wait for the night.
- 5 0800hrs, 28 May:** One *Radfahr-Schwadron* from Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 95 moves down the coast road to Kalami where 3./GJR 85 has captured a bridge.
- 6 1020hrs, 28 May:** German motorcyclists reach the demolished road bridge. Wittmann brings up the *schwere Schwadron* of Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 95 and deploys a *Radfahr-Schwadron* to attack. IV./GAR 95 offers fire support.
- 7 1100hrs, 28 May:** The German attack succeeds and a *Kradschützen-Kompanie* exploits to Neon Khorion.
- 8 1220hrs, 28 May:** With Pene's platoons back under command, Royal orders a new line to be established, but at 1230hrs he decides to withdraw.
- 9 1330hrs, 28 May:** Kampfgruppe *Wittmann* is held up at Babali Hani by the rest of D Bn, Layforce and 2/8 Aust Bn.
- 10 1430–1500hrs, 28 May:** Royal's men, having crossed the Kofliaris River, enter the Mesopotamos Valley and pass through the village of Armenoi. The rearguard ambushes a *Kradschützen* patrol as it enters the village.
- 11 1800hrs, 28 May:** Royal's force reaches the main road and marches overnight to join the rest of 28 (Māori) Bn.
- 12 2200hrs, 28 May:** A joint attack by Kampfgruppe *Wittmann* and III./GJR 85 captures Babali Hani, already vacated by the commandos and Australians.

Battlefield environment

On Crete, the *Kradschützen* would be influenced by the environmental factors, but their motorcycles and sidecars gave them a unique ability to move quickly. There were few metalled roads to make use of, however, and the gradient of many of the dirt tracks made such routes unusable. The Allies were better off, as enough motor transport was available for at least a brigade's worth of troops. There was plenty of cover for both sides to utilize.

Fighting on Crete was dictated by the nature of the mountainous terrain, the poor road network, and the dispersed nature of airborne operations. The availability of resupply and reinforcements limited how the invasion force would operate. Generalmajor Julius Ringel, who commanded 5. Gebirgs-Division, ordered commanders to avoid frontal attacks and instead carry out small outflanking moves to limit casualties. Reconnaissance, he wrote, was to be carried out particularly thoroughly, above all at night when raids and ambushes by the enemy were to be expected. Ammunition must be used extremely sparingly. The unusual nature of the fighting would, the order went on, make it necessary to have ground patrols out all the time and every unit was responsible for their immediate area. The lack of motorized transport made it necessary for troops to requisition civilian transport. On 26 May, Ringel reported 'the enemy makes very skillful use of the country and every method of warfare' (quoted in DA 438.22/7: 51). Identifying the enemy was not easy in the olive groves and he ordered troops 'not to wear pith helmets or New Zealand hats. All soldiers wearing

such headgear will be fired on' (quoted in DA 438.22/7: 58).

INTO COMBAT

While elements of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85 on the right flank pushed towards Stilos, Generalmajor Julius Ringel, commander of 5. Gebirgs-Division, put together a *Kampfgruppe* on the coastal road to assist them. At 1745hrs on 27 May, Oberstleutnant August Wittmann, commanding Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 95, was given '95 Mtn Arty Regt HQ; 55 MC Bn [minus one coy]; 95 Recce Unit; 2 platoons of 95 A Tk unit; 4/95 Mtn Arty; 1 battery of parachute artillery; 1 heavy inf gun platoon of 100 Mtn Regt; 2 tanks [available on 29 May]; engineer section' and told to pursue 'to Rethimnon [Retimo], relieve the parachutists there, and push on to Iraklion to relieve Col Brauer's parachutists' (Wittmann, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 83). This order focused German attention away from the road to Sfakia.

Because some of Wittmann's formations were moving up from the southern and western coasts, only Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 95, the artillery and the engineers were ready by 0330hrs on 28 May. According to Krakau, by then, Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85 had 'advanced 30 km over completely trackless, steep mountain country ... in the scorching summer heat' (quoted in DA 438.22/7: 58), but his claim that Armenoi was reached by 1800hrs on 27 May was unrealistic, according to the historian Dan Davin. That day, Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 95 tried to reach Armenoi on a wide outflanking move through Furnes and Mesulla, but was turned back by difficult terrain south of Furnes.



On 29 May, Wittmann was sent eastwards and reached Retimo at noon. Two tanks that had landed at Kastelli on the night of 28/29 May helped him attack the airfield and release 300 German prisoners of war. Iraklion was also occupied by 1200hrs. Generalmajor Julius Ringel, commander of 5. Gebirgs-Division, would praise the motorcyclists for their bravery and all were awarded an Iron Cross 1st or 2nd class. The fast speed of their sidecars was again utilized; however, as well as dealing with mountainous terrain, pontoons needed to be built over water courses whose bridges were destroyed – as is evident in this image, taken on 29 May. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1980-020-22 / Foto: o. Ang)

Sfakia lay 40 miles away over the White Mountains and the Plain of Askifou. At midnight on 27 May at the Megara (Beritiana) turn-off (3 miles north of Stilos), Royal with A Coy and B Coy (approximately 130 men) was told to deny the enemy the road junction until 2100hrs on 28 May. Royal's party would be supported by Maj R. McGibbon's E Coy (110 men) of D Bn, Layforce – an ad hoc commando brigade – positioned to cover a road bridge being prepared for demolition. Half of E Coy was made up of Spanish Civil War veterans who, according to McGibbon, were worried that if captured by the Germans they would be shot as communists.

Royal deployed on the hills overlooking the coast road. Lt R. Pene's B Coy was on the right forward position and A Coy – commanded by Lt W. Porter,

back from hospital, as Baker was wounded at 42nd Street, and with Lt Te Puni as a platoon commander – covered the rear. At 0500hrs, the Spaniards from D Bn's E Coy decided to join commandos of A Bn, Layforce as they withdrew down the road to Stilos. Royal immediately dispatched Pene with 11 Plt and 12 Plt to the road bridge; Pene's men 'were fortunately in time to meet the enemy attack which developed first in that area' (Royal: 2). He could see the road back to Suda was 'lined with enemy transports and troops, light armoured vehicles and field guns' (Royal: 2).

On 27 May, Wittmann reported 'Observation of the area forward of the battle zone suggests that the enemy is small in numbers, but in cleverly camouflaged fire positions' (quoted in DA 438.22/7: 52). He described how his mobile force was temporarily held up on the road 2–3 miles east of Suda by '2 demolitions. All available men were called forward, and these craters were made passable for all vehicles by shortly after 0900 hrs [0800hrs British time]' (quoted in DA 438.22/7: 83). Royal reported how artillery shelled his right rear and at 0800hrs an enemy company (probably from Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 95) went past the right flank down the coast road to Kalami where it could access the Kofliaris Valley. Furthermore, Krakau reported that morning how, operating further inland, Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85's '3 Coy, acting on its own initiative, pushed forward over Pt 231.75 to the bridge 2 km south of Kalami, removed demolition charges and captured this vital bridge intact' (quoted in DA 438.22/7: 82). The bulk of I./GJR 85 was moving north up the Stilos road to open it up from the south, and Royal observed commandos (from A Bn) captured half a mile behind his position. Royal was already threatened with encirclement.

At Stilos, Hargest thought Royal would decide to withdraw, but to make sure, he tried to send a messenger through at 0915hrs on a motorcycle with a tank and some carriers as escort – but no messenger got through. At 0900hrs Hargest had asked the battalion commanders whether they could hold on to Stilos all day and resume the retreat at night; Dittmer had 'a dim view of pulling out and leaving A and B Companies high and dry' (quoted in Davin 1953: 400), but the Australian officer Brig A. Vasey was for marching. Already that morning II./GJR 85 had reached nearly a mile north of town before being driven back. At 1000hrs the march south began; the hill west of Stilos fell, but the Germans did not have infantry guns to engage the withdrawing New Zealanders retreating down the road. Only at 0300hrs on 30 May, following a journey of 15 miles and a climb of over 3,000ft, would they reach relative sanctuary on the Askifou Plain.



Evacuation from Greece was a trying experience as these men could probably testify, with more than 50,000 troops brought out. Here, on Crete, some of the 6,700 New Zealand soldiers recover from their ordeal. When 28 (Māori) Bn arrived in Suda Bay on 25 April, some men were without webbing and helmets, but the majority still had their weapons and equipment thanks to Lt-Col G.

Dittmer, CO 28 (Māori) Bn, having told them to disregard orders to discard equipment at the embarkation sites. The German intelligence assessment was inaccurate and indicated the British only had 5,000 men distributed over Crete. As a result they were not deterred from trying to capture all three of the airfields – at Maleme, Rethimnon and Iraklion. 2nd NZ Division bore the brunt of the German invasion as it was responsible for the western end of Crete, where the Germans gained a foothold around Maleme airfield. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-01110-F)

Back at Megara, at 0900hrs a German observer on a height overlooking Royal's position directed accurate mortar fire on Sgt Eddie Morgan's 10 Plt, forcing it to withdraw 50yd to the rear slopes while the forward slopes were covered from a flank by Pte Makaore and two stray Australians. Then Kradschützen-Bataillon 55 (minus one reinforced *Kompanie* that had motored south from Maleme to Paläochora on the south coast) and one *Panzerjäger-Zug* reported in to Wittmann and at 1020hrs (0920hrs British time) they encountered Royal's forces at the demolished road bridge (the position held by Pene). Wittmann ordered a *Radfahr-Schwadron* of Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 95 to attack the southern slopes, supported by the *schwere Kompanie*

and artillery. He reported that

The mortars, A Tk and mountain guns fired with such good effect that we soon succeeded in making a detour round the crater, and about 1200 hrs [1100hrs British time] the forward company of 55 MC Bn, supported by the heavy weapons, broke through towards the pass mentioned above. There was no more opposition except for a few isolated riflemen. (Wittmann, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 83)



During the withdrawal from Stilos, Lt Rangi Logan wrote that 'the men were moving automatically, almost insensible to time and place. It was then that I had the greatest difficulty in holding them together and keeping them moving' (quoted in Cody 1956: 125). The march to the evacuation beaches on the south coast of Crete was arduous in the extreme; here the final approach to the small fishing port at Sfakia is shown. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-01150-F)

The remaining commandos with Pene broke and withdrew. Royal interviewed the officer in charge (whether this was McGibbon or not is unclear) who said that he had informed the Māori platoon commander he was withdrawing; Pene's platoons were still in place, however, and as they were now 'hotly engaged' (Royal: 2), Royal sent a message for them to pull back behind Megara where he could assume command of them. By 1220hrs this new position was established, but Royal soon realized this was a temporary expedient; earlier, he had observed how 'what appeared to be a bn was streaming down the ridge towards Stilos' and at 1230hrs, because 'the position seemed hopeless I decided to withdraw' (Royal: 2).

Wittmann, meanwhile, moved down the road to Neon Khorion with *Kradschützen* and captured more members of A Bn. '1 reinforced MC company; the engineers; 1 platoon of parachute artillery; A Tk platoon; the heavy squadron of 95 Recce Unit' were in the lead, followed by the rest, except for '1 cycle squadron, which was reinforced with an A Tk platoon and sent forward on its own along the Kalami-Wamos road' down the Kofliaris valley (Wittmann, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 83). At 1300hrs at Babali Hani, 3km south-

east of Neon Khorion, D Bn and 2/8 Aust Bn on high ground ‘completely commanded the road, using an excellent system of flanking fire and a great many snipers. At least one enemy tank blocked our advance on the road’ (Wittmann, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 83). At 1330hrs the forward

Zug tried to break through, but failed. At 1535hrs the whole of the advance guard was committed, but the Allied position held despite mortars and Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bombers targeting their positions. The commandos covering 2,500yd had built sangars of rock because there were no entrenching tools. Wittmann reported ‘Observation was too poor for our artillery to be effective, and our tanks had not yet arrived, and so we had to desist from attacking ... Furthermore we expected the Esch [III] Bn of Krakau Gp to launch a two-pronged attack to outflank the enemy [that evening]’ (Wittmann, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 84). At 2200hrs, one *Gebirgsjäger-Kompanie* penetrated to within a mile of the crossroads and another climbed a hill overlooking the position. Wittmann edged forward and realized the enemy had retreated. His casualties for that day were three officers and eight other ranks killed plus 19 other ranks wounded. Ringel ordered a halt overnight.

The resistance at Babali Hani gave Royal a chance to catch up with his battalion. At 1030hrs on 28 May he had sent off a few walking wounded and two stretcher cases in B Coy and one seriously wounded and several walking cases in A Coy. Four men were detailed to each stretcher and told to throw away their rifles. The A Coy party under SSgt H.Y.T. Samuel marched straight down the road; the B Coy party under Sgt T. Pitman kept off the road and managed to avoid the enemy. Their stretcher cases, Pte ‘Darkie’ Hall and Pte Ted Leonard, wanted to be abandoned, but the bearers threw away the stretchers and carried them.

Royal, because he ‘thought the tracks marked on the map in my possession would be watched and covered by the enemy’ (Royal: 2), decided to follow an unlikely route to provide cover from the air. With A Coy forming the rear, the New Zealanders scrambled down a steep cliff and swam the Kofliaris River without being noticed; however, ‘on climbing the other side of the valley, the column was subjected to heavy M.M.G. fire from the enemy but there were no casualties’ (Royal: 2). They climbed the next hill without hindrance and entered the Mesopotamos Valley. Following a 30-minute rest they proceeded along the valley, crossing many streams before arriving north of Armenoi village. An attempt to bypass the village was halted by enemy fire.

Royal decided ‘to put a bold front and go through the village of ARMENOI arranging my column as for village fighting’ (Royal: 3). Bayonets were fixed

and the Māori formed two lines – one each side of the road – with Brens at intervals and captured MG 34 machine guns in the rear. Royal was out front in the centre of the road with three Tommy-gunners in arrowhead formation either side of him. They passed through the village without major incident and took an uphill path by the church to get off the main road. A German motorcycle section made an appearance and ‘the column was halted whilst the rearguard dealt with them’ (Royal: 3). The tail of the column was clear of the road before the Germans in the village opened fire, which was returned by the MG 34s. At the top of the hill, the New Zealanders came under fire again, seemingly from long range; the men did not bother to stop and the column reached Kaina. ‘During our whole progress aircraft were searching for us and numerous stops were made en route until searching aircraft had passed’ (Royal: 3).



A sidecar belonging to a *Gebirgsjäger* unit is shown in this image. While the location could be the Balkans, the date is unknown and in 1941 *Gebirgsjäger* were not mandated to have many, if any, sidecars in their *Aufklärungs-Abteilungen*. On 26 May, *Gebirgs-Aufklärungs-Abteilung* 95 reported that some tracks on Crete were impracticable for bicycles and motorcycles. (Author's Collection)

Now behind the Australian rearguard, Royal's party was guided by a Greek villager, reaching the main road at 1800hrs and then moving on to Vryses.

Two donkeys were requisitioned to carry two wounded men (Cpl Mita Francis and Pte Toi Wharewera), and they met up with eight Māori of B Coy carrying their wounded before being led over to the battalion bivouac at 0400hrs on 29 May. Royal reported one dead and six wounded. His party covered another 7 miles across the Askifou Plain to reach a camp 3 miles north of Sfakia. Even so, on 30 May the possibility of escape appeared to be threatened for many as, owing to shipping losses, Dittmer was told only 230 men of the battalion could embark. Six officers and 144 men had to stay, comprising D Coy under Maj Dyer, Lt Porter and 27 other ranks from A Coy and Lt Pene and 26 other ranks from B Coy with, in total, ten Bren guns and 11 Thompson submachine guns. Married soldiers were told to leave, but some refused. All those who stayed were volunteers. The others embarked by 0300hrs on 30 May and reached Alexandria at 1900hrs. That night Dyer formed a cordon to enable further embarkations and at 0200hrs the remaining Māori managed to get away. Two battalions from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 that had pursued them to Sfakia had not pressed them.

Freyberg was never optimistic about the Crete campaign and always mistakenly believed that German Ju 52/3m transport planes would be able to land at sites other than airfields. As a result he did not give sufficient attention to recapturing Maleme airfield. Opportunities were missed on the nights of 21/22 and 22/23 May. He was always aware of his responsibility to keep 2nd NZ Division in existence, but these errors led in no small part to the Allied defeat; and of 7,702 New Zealand soldiers on Crete, 671 were killed, 1,455 wounded and 1,692 captured.

A Cretan ambush



In the afternoon of 28 May, the main road through the village of Armenoi provided some shelter from the sun and Capt Royal's men from 28 (Māori) Bn had passed through the Cretan village, crossing the main road and disappearing up the side road past the church. A small rearguard was covering the move and from the north the New Zealanders heard the sound of approaching motorcycles. This scene depicts the rearguard carrying out an ambush on the *Kradschützen-Gruppe* that has unsuspectingly driven down the road straight into them. Royal's rearguard comprised men with a captured German MG 34 machine gun, a few riflemen, a Bren-gunner and Tommy-gunners.

Analysis

In the 1950s, New Zealand society was nostalgic about the war and official war histories dutifully chronicled unit achievements. The New Zealand historian John McLeod noted that resourceful and independently minded New Zealand soldiers had a reputation as being ‘a natural soldier, as good if not better than those of any other nationality’; furthermore, they were ‘sturdy in physique, used to outdoor living, energetic, and capable of great endurance’ (McLeod 1986: 80). He also suggested there was an attitude that because World War I had shown them as naturally good fighters, training was not that important.

The Germans were reluctant to invade Greece, but the deployment of British troops forced their hand. New Zealand troops were committed by the politicians without a proper appreciation of the military dangers, without even thinking the Yugoslavs would stage a coup to overthrow the pro-German government. While the War Office stated in 1942 that they thought defensive positions could have held firm, from the outset Wilson planned an orderly retreat. On 13 April, while holding the Servia positions he realized how the positions could be outflanked and already prepared to withdraw to the Thermopylae Line. The defenders only once carried out a withdrawal before superior numbers were deployed against them – at Platamon, where Balck’s improvisation threatened to upset the Allied plans. Here, in their first experience of battle, to prevent a rapid German attack on the critical road junction at Larissa, 21 NZ Bn held Castle Hill and Hill 226 until Macky authorized withdrawal the following day, but he gave up his positions without orders. He reported his responsibility was to ensure ‘all reasonable precautions’ (quoted in Woods 2012: 111) were in place in his battalion’s first action and having suffered only eight dead, ten wounded and two sections captured, the battalion pulled out to establish positions at the Pinios further south. Although apprehensive, the troops had looked forward to their first action. Morale had held together and 21 NZ Bn did not break – in no small part because tanks were unable to get onto the ridge.



A German motorcycle trooper in the Soviet Union is depicted in this print from *Signal*, a wartime German magazine, in September 1942. (Photo by Art Media/Print Collector/Getty Images)

At Platamon, 5 NZ Bde underestimated the Germans' ability to cross difficult terrain with tanks and allocated no anti-tank guns to 21 NZ Bn; but with the assistance of engineers equipped with explosives and entrenching tools the battalion had time to dig deep, mutually supporting positions. Macky also identified the heights near Pandeleimon as important to the position, but deployed only C Coy there; operating alone, it could not hold out indefinitely against the two German battalions that were brought to bear against it. D Coy

on the reverse slope could have carried out more aggressive patrolling, but lacked combat experience and training, and the Germans had the freedom to deploy at night without interference. Thus while 618 men were available, only battalion HQ, three companies and the mortar section (410 men) were engaged.



Of 16,472 New Zealand soldiers in Greece, 272 were killed, 1,793 were made prisoner, 33 were missing and 391 were evacuated wounded. Here, a column of New Zealand prisoners is led away past a PzKpfw IV medium tank. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-163-0332-25 / Foto: Scheerer (e))

German losses were high, with Balck reporting that Kradschützen-Bataillon 2 lost 25 per cent of its strength (this equates to 262 men). The battalion's initial attack on 15 April showed complacency rather than inexperience. Oberstleutnant Stollbrock's men did not carry out sufficient reconnaissance and misunderstood the width of the defensive positions; the flanking move was not coordinated and support weapons were not present. Infiltration at night was under-utilized; however, a passive defence ensured that once the nature of the New Zealand positions were fully determined, Stollbrock could redeploy his men to unhinge them. Deployment on heights further inland took time, but was necessary as an assault by boat behind 21 NZ Bn positions that might have prompted Macky to withdraw earlier had to be abandoned because of bad

weather.

When Balck took over on the evening of 15 April he proved a more dynamic leader than his adversary. Macky used field telephones to issue orders to company commanders; Balck issued them verbally. Balck was with his men and a witness to the attack. Macky did not influence the battle once the action started. He went to bed on the night of 15 April and is not recorded as having visited the positions. In the event the defences were turned out of sight of both commanders at Pandeimon. At the Pinios on 17 April Macky was again outmatched by Balck, and the impact of a handful of German tanks was fully realized. New Zealand infantry were more exposed than at Platamon because entrenchments could not be dug to sufficient depth. There was little natural cover and rear slopes were observable from the northern bank.

At Servia, Sponeck's troops also had to penetrate a mountain pass, but up against a brigade armed with a full complement of heavy weapons, the Germans' task was much harder. Instead of waiting for more support troops to arrive, two *Schützen-Kompanien* marched straight into the pass at night with few heavy weapons and little coordination with the two *Kradschützen-Kompanien* sent on an optimistic foray to open the pass from behind. With orders to storm the pass and with no indications that it was heavily defended, Sponeck's men were ambushed and driven back with heavy loss. The main problem was that 'neither air recce nor the general situation indicated that we might run up against a defensive position, and also that it was necessary to make a bold stroke and seize the pass at the risk of being driven back' (Sponeck, quoted in AWM 54: 12). An aerial reconnaissance report had stated that 'there was not a single enemy soldier between the river and the heights SW of Servia' (9. PzDiv War Diary, quoted in AWM 54: 2). Sponeck blamed the defeat on how 'the enemy used a military device which our troops were not prepared for. Taking advantage of his unusually favourable positions, he allowed the companies to run in to a trap and opened fire on them at very short range' (quoted in Sinclair 1954: 82).

While the Germans experienced sharp rebuffs at Servia and Platamon, battlefield success elsewhere was used to justify their tactics of pressing on regardless in an effort to shock the defenders into running. Different units competed with each other, vying for the glory of capturing objectives. Such an approach prioritized tactical over strategic reality and would not work as well in the Soviet Union. Rather than breaking enemy resistance themselves or relying on the Panzers to help them, the *Kradschützen* were more accustomed to the assistance of *Gebirgsjäger* who marched long distances with little food or rest over mountainous terrain to turn the flank of defensive positions. This

reliance persisted on Crete where Oberst Krakau argued that his Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85 ‘played the deciding part in the breaking of the Suda Bay positions’ and asserted that ‘The road was thus cleared for the divisional advance guard to pursue the beaten enemy’ (Krakau, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 82). Wittmann was more balanced, and thought ‘the fact that the Krakau Gp and the advance guard launched their attacks simultaneously had a great effect’ (Wittmann, quoted in DA 438.22/7: 83). The combined-arms Kampfgruppe *Wittmann* could probably have driven off Royal’s men (who lacked the support weapons to interdict the main roads from high ground) on their own, but needed help to break the more solid defences at Neon Khorion. Once through, the speed of the *Kradschützen* quickly brought about the inevitable relief of the *Fallschirmjäger* at Retimo and Iraklion, but the New Zealanders were permitted to evacuate from the south coast – an eventuality the *Kradschützen*, owing to the terrain, would not have prevented even if they were committed south across the White Mountains.

The historian John McGraph stated that once the war started, ‘much prewar theory, particularly that related to the sharp division between reconnaissance missions and combat actions, evaporated in the face of battlefield reality’ (quoted in Edwards 2014: 52). As defensive firepower increased, tactical information needed to be fought for, and the tactics used by dedicated reconnaissance assets had to adapt. In addition, reconnaissance forces could not survive long enough to use their agility in ways they wanted. Heavier weapons and better protection were needed, and *Kradschützen* on motorcycles were simply too vulnerable to survive. In 1941 this vulnerability was starting to reveal itself, but overarching strategic realities in Greece and on Crete gave them a vital role to play.



Here are some of the 380 officers and men from 28 (Māori) Bn who escaped from Crete. The campaign in Greece and Crete cost the battalion 13 officers and 219 other ranks either killed or captured. Reinforcements comprising 11 officers and 240 other ranks awaited them in Egypt. Training started and the emphasis was now on offensive operations for desert warfare. (Alexander Turnbull Library, DA-09662-F)

Aftermath

21 NZ Bn arrived in Egypt in company strength (18 NZ Bn and 19 NZ Bn were at approximately half strength) and all needed to absorb reinforcements and reform. Training for offensive operations in the desert started in July 1941, and in October the battalions deployed forward. In late November, 2nd NZ Division took part in the offensive to relieve Tobruk in Libya. The operation – the first offensive by the New Zealanders – succeeded in no small part due to movement by night, but losses were heavy and amounted to 879 men killed, 1,700 wounded and around 2,000 made prisoner. A counterattack by 15. Panzer-Division against 4 NZ Bde and 6 NZ Bde on the escarpment at Sidi Rezegh caused many casualties because tank support from the remnants of 7th Armoured Division was denied the New Zealanders; however, over the previous few days the New Zealanders had caused the German infantry severe loss, and the Deutsches Afrikakorps had to withdraw. The New Zealanders underwent a refit and could have deployed to the Far East. Instead, in June 1942 they were committed to stall the German offensive across the Egyptian border. That October, 4 NZ Bde (including 18 NZ Bn and 19 NZ Bn) became 4 NZ Armd Bde; a year later, Freyberg would have the integral tank support he always wanted when his division deployed to Italy.

In April 1941, 9. Panzer-Division redeployed for the invasion of the Soviet Union while 2. Panzer-Division remained on occupation duties in Greece. In October, 2. and 5. Panzer-Divisionen operated among the numerous waterways and marshland in front of Moscow. The *Kradschützen* were hampered by the terrain and found that instead of capitulating once surrounded or bypassed, the Soviet soldier would often attack the advance guard from the rear. By the end of 1941, heavy losses forced the reconnaissance and motorcycle battalions to amalgamate, but during the Soviet winter offensive they performed successful delaying actions because their excellent communication equipment allowed them to apply the principles of economy of effort, deception and surprise. In November 1941, KStN 1112 was modified, with two 8cm mortars replacing the three 5cm mortars; each *Kradschützen-Zug* had an anti-tank rifle, and a *Panzerjäger-Zug* comprising three 2.8cm *schwere* Panzerbüsche (sPzB) 41 heavy anti-tank rifles, each towed by a Kfz 70 six-wheeled personnel carrier, was incorporated into the *schwere Kompanie*. Further reforms were soon

needed as operations in the Soviet Union needed a better cross-country performance, crew protection and firepower than the motorcycle could provide. The SdKfz 250 light half-track armoured personnel carrier would start to replace the motorcycle in 1942, but insufficient production meant this process was slow and in some cases the *Kübelwagen* (car) and *Kettenkrad* (tracked motorcycle) were utilized in the interim. The utility of motorcycles in the desert was similarly limited as the rocky ground hindered movement; the reconnaissance battalions of 15. and 21. Panzer-Divisionen – Aufklärungs-Abteilung 33 (mot.) and Aufklärungs-Abteilung 3 (mot.) – each used *Kübelwagen* rather than motorcycles to equip their 3. Kompanien; furthermore, in April 1942 15. Panzer-Division's Kradschützen-Bataillon 15 was converted into a *Schützen-Bataillon*.



In the Soviet Union, 9. Panzer-Division would operate over the open Ukrainian steppes. The distances to be covered and the resources of the enemy in terms of numbers and material were

daunting. Here, the vulnerability of *Kradschützen* is apparent in June 1942 as those from 24. Panzer-Division dismount while under fire from buildings further down the road. In early 1942 the term *Kradschützen-Bataillon* was retained, but the organization was transformed with the usual addition of one armoured-car and one SdKfz 250 light half-track armoured-personnel-carrier company. In 1942, 5. Panzer-Division mounted a *Kradschützen-Kompanie* in SdKfz 250s. However, along with an armoured-car company, 2. and 9. Panzer-Divisionen still persisted with three *Kradschützen-Kompanien* and a *schwere Kompanie*. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-216-0447-16A/ Foto: Dieck)

UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

New Zealand

Battalion strength was based on the 1931 British stipulation of 32 officers and 744 other ranks. There were more support platoons than in the 1918 battalion and the four rifle companies were smaller, with three instead of four platoons each. This meant the battalion had only 508 infantrymen compared with 880 in 1918.

The battalion HQ had four officers and 43 men. The HQ Coy had signals (one officer and 33 men), anti-aircraft (one officer and 16 men with four Brens), mortar (one officer and 17 men with two 3in mortars), Bren-gun carrier (one officer and 29 men with ten carriers and ten Brens), pioneer (one officer and 20 men) and administrative and transport platoons (two officers and 92 men). Each of the four rifle companies had an HQ section with two officers and ten men, and three platoons. Each rifle platoon fielded three sections and had one officer and either 37 or 38 men. Platoon HQ had one 2in mortar and one Boys anti-tank rifle. Rifle sections with a Bren had ten men.

Germany

In April 1941, the *Kradschützen-Bataillon* had a standard organization of a *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie*, a *schwere Kompanie* and three *Kradschützen Kompanien*. Each *Kradschützen-Kompanie* had 17 wheeled vehicles and trucks as well as 55 sidecars and ten motorcycles. The unit, commanded by either an *Oberleutnant* or a *Hauptmann*, had a command group with two NCOs and ten soldiers carried in a Kfz 11, Kfz 13, a sidecar and three motorcycles, and three *Züge*. There was also a combat train within each *Kompanie* with six NCOs and 11 soldiers armed with five pistols and 12 rifles (on a Kfz 15, four trucks and two sidecars), and a baggage train with four soldiers armed with four rifles (on a motorcycle and truck).

Each *Zug* had a *Leutnant* or senior NCO, four NCOs and 43 soldiers equipped with eight pistols, 34 rifles, six MG 34 machine guns and a 5cm mortar, organized into a *HQ-Gruppe* (on a Kfz 11, Kfz 18 and two motorcycles), a *Granatwerfer-Gruppe* (on two sidecars), and three squads (each on four sidecars). There was also a *sMG-Zug* with one officer, seven NCOs and 43 soldiers with 18 pistols, 33 rifles and four heavy machine guns organized into a headquarters and telephone section (one Kfz 18, two Kfz 15, one motorcycle and two sidecars), and two *MG-Gruppen* (each on eight sidecars).

The HQ *Kompanie* (KStN 1109, issued in October 1937 and revised in February 1941) had six officers and 72 men with 17 wheeled vehicles, four sidecars, four motorcycles and as well as a command element and combat, rations, baggage, and maintenance trains, a signal detachment that comprised two telephone sections, two backpack radio sections and two SdKfz 261 armoured radio cars.

The *schwere Kompanie* in April 1941 had a *Panzerjäger-Zug* (three towed 3.7cm anti-tank guns), an *IG-Zug* (two towed 7.5cm infantry guns), and a lorried *Pionier-Zug* with four MG 34s. The *Maschinengewehr-Kompanie* (KStN 1118, issued in October 1938 and updated in February 1941) had two *MG-Züge*, each with four MG 34s and a telephone section carried on one motorcycle, nine sidecars, one Kfz 11 and one Kfz 18, and a *Granatwerfer-Zug* with six 8cm mortars carried in ten Kfz 70 six-wheeled personnel carriers. *Kompanie* HQ also had two telephone sections.



These German motorcyclists of a Panzer division are pictured near Skopje (Macedonia) with a captured Yugoslavian officer in the sidecar, c.14 April 1941. (Photo by Weltbild/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

<http://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz/>

<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/files/documents/28mb/rangi-royal-report.pdf>

Unpublished

Australian War Memorial

AWM 54, 534/2/27. German Army Documents on the Greek Campaign Translated by W.D. Dawson, Dept of Internal Affairs, Wellington, from German Military Documents Section (GMDS) held in Washington, DC.

‘War for the Passes’, an extract from *American Infantry Journal* of October 1941, AWM 3DRL 6643 3/42.

Archives New Zealand

2NZEf – 19 NZ Battalion – Battle of Servia Pass – Northern Greece – W.R. Cresswell 1941. ADQZ 18886 WAI1/153 DA 49/10/21.

2NZEf – 4 NZ Infantry Brigade – Report on Operations in Greece – E. Puttick 1941. ADQZ 18886 WAI1/146 DA 46/10/1.

2NZEf – 21 NZ Battalion – Activities During Greek Campaign – A.A. Yeoman 1941. ADQZ 18886 WAI1/156 DA 54/10/2.

2NZEf – 21 NZ Battalion – Activities of 21 Battalion in Greece and Crete – A. Trousdale 1941. ADQZ 18886 WAI1/156 DA 54/10/3.

Enemy documents (no date) - ADQZ 18886 WAI1/335 DA 438.22/7 Sections 7 (Appendices to 5th Mtn Div War Diary), 11 (Krakau Report) and 12 (Wittmann Report) – German Army Documents on the Campaign on Crete Translated by W.D. Dawson, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, from GMDS held in Washington, DC.

Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv, Freiburg I.B.

Schmalz, Abteilung 1a. Kradschützenbataillon 59, 25 May 1941, ‘Gefechtsbericht über den Einsatz der 1. und 3. Kompanie beim Kampf um Servia von bis 184.1941’, BA MA RH 39/699.

Hofmann, Oblt. u. Kompanie-Chef, 8./Schtz.Regt.11, 17 April 1941, ‘Bericht über die Kampfhandlungen der 8. Kp. am 14. und 15. April 1941’, BA MA RH 27-9/3.

Signature, Schützenregiment 11 Ia, 16 April, to 9. Panzer Division, ‘Betr.: Bericht über den Angriff auf die Stena Portas’, BA MA RH 27-9/3.

Published

Cody, J.F. (1953). *21 Battalion*. Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.

Cody, J.F. (1956). *28 (Maori) Battalion*. Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.

Davin, Dan (1953). *Crete*. Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.

Dawson, W.D. (1961). *18th Battalion and Armoured Regiment*. Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.

Edwards, Robert J. (2015). *Tip of the Spear: German Armored Reconnaissance in Action in World War II*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole.

Edwards, Robert J. (2014). *Scouts Out: A History of German Armored Reconnaissance Units in World*

- War II. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole.
- Ewer, P. (2008). *The Forgotten Anzacs: The campaign in Greece, 1941*. Melbourne: Scribe.
- French, David (2000). *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War Against Germany 1919–45*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gardiner, Wira (1994). *Te Mura o Te Ahi: The Story of the Maori Battalion*. Auckland: Reed Publishing Ltd.
- Kippenberger, Major-General Sir Howard (1949). *Infantry Brigadier*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Manteuffel, Hasso (1937). *Kradfahrer! Kradschützen! Anleitung für die Ausbildung sowie Anregungen für das Verhalten im Gefecht*. Berlin: Verlag Offene Wort.
- McClymont, W.G. (1959). *To Greece*. Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.
- McLeod, John (1986). *Myth and Reality: The New Zealand Soldier in World War II*. Auckland: Heinemann Reed.
- Pugsley, C. (2014). *A Bloody Road Home: WWII and New Zealand's Heroic Second Division*. Auckland: Penguin.
- Sinclair, D.W. (1954). *19th Battalion and Armoured Regiment*. Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.
- Stewart, I.McD.G. (1991). *The Struggle for Crete: A Story of Lost Opportunity 20 May–1 June 1941*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stockings, Craig & Hancock, Eleanor (2013). *Swastika Over the Acropolis*. Leiden: Brill.
- Woods, Peter (2012). 'A Battle to Win: An Analysis of Combat Effectiveness through the Second World War experience of the 21st (Auckland) Battalion'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Massey University.

Author

David Greentree graduated in History at York before taking an MA in War Studies from King's College London and qualifying as a lecturer in Further Education. In 1995 he accepted a commission in the Royal Air Force and has served in a variety of locations, including Afghanistan and Oman.

Illustrator

Adam Hook studied graphic design, and began his work as an illustrator in 1983. He specializes in detailed historical reconstructions, and has illustrated Osprey titles on subjects as diverse as the Aztecs, the Ancient Greeks, Roman battle tactics, several 19th-century American subjects, the modern Chinese Army, and a number of books in the Fortress series. His work features in exhibitions and publications throughout the world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Shaun McGuire and David Knight at Archives New Zealand in Wellington, Lee-Anne Gwynne and Susie Raymond at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and Frau Frischmuth at the Bundesarchiv in Freiburg for help locating primary research material. Thanks also to David Campbell for access to his library of secondary sources, artist Adam Hook for his patience, and Nick Reynolds for his editorial advice.

Artist's note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the artwork plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Scorpio, 158 Mill Road, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 2SH, UK Email: scorpiopaintings@btinternet.com

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

Comparative ranks

German

Generalfeldmarschall
Generaloberst
General der Infanterie, etc.
Generalleutnant
Generalmajor
Oberst
Oberstleutnant
Major
Hauptmann
Oberleutnant
Leutnant
Hauptfeldwebel
Oberfeldwebel
Feldwebel
Unterfeldwebel
Unteroffizier
Stabsgefreiter
Obergefreiter
Gefreiter
Oberschütze

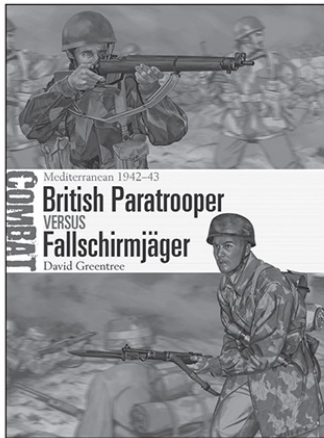
British

field marshal (FM)
general (Gen)
lieutenant-general (Lt-Gen)
major-general (Maj-Gen)
brigadier (Brig)
colonel (Col)
lieutenant-colonel (Lt-Col)
major (Maj)
captain (Capt)
1st lieutenant (Lt)
2nd lieutenant (2/Lt)
warrant officer class I (WO I)
warrant officer class II (WO II) platoon sergeant-major (PSM)
staff sergeant (S-Sgt)
sergeant (Sgt)
corporal (Cpl)
n/a
n/a
lance corporal (L/Cpl)
n/a

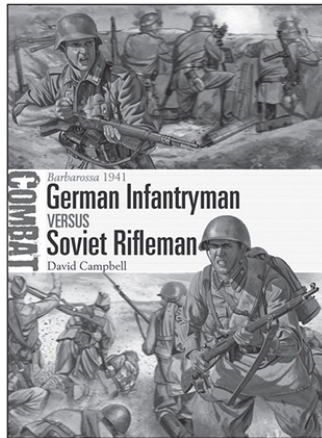
Schütze

private/rifleman (Pte/Rfmn)

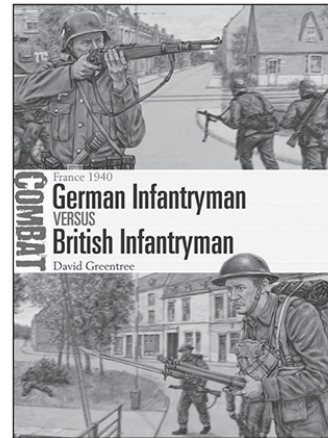
Other titles in the Combat series



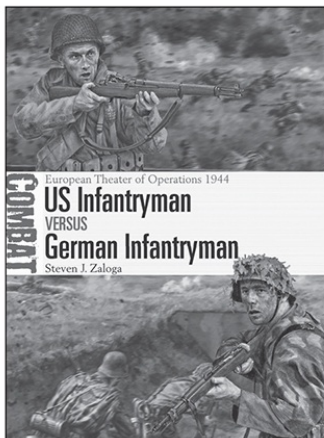
CBT No: 1 • ISBN: 978 1 78096 924 4



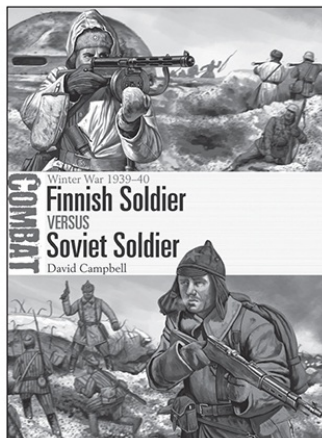
CBT No: 7 • ISBN: 978 1 4728 0324 5



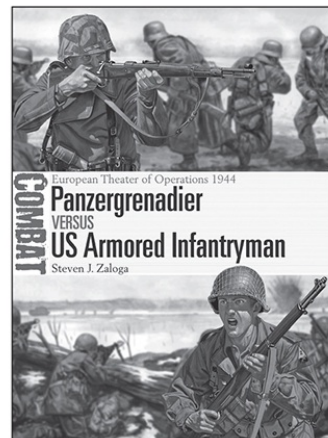
CBT No: 14 • ISBN: 978 1 4728 1240 7



CBT No: 15 • ISBN: 978 1 4728 0137 1

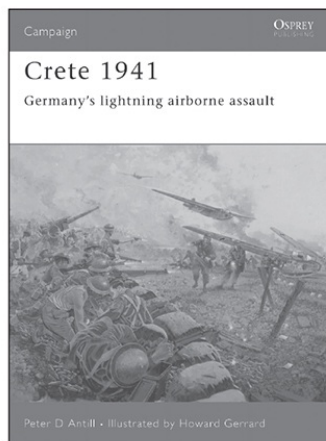


CBT No: 21 • ISBN: 978 1 4728 1324 4

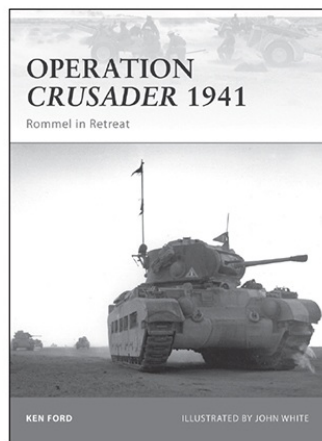


CBT No: 22 • ISBN: 978 1 4728 1707 5

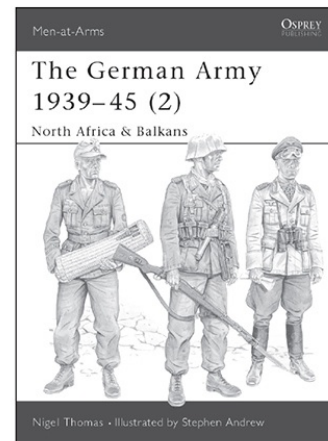
Discover more at www.ospreypublishing.com



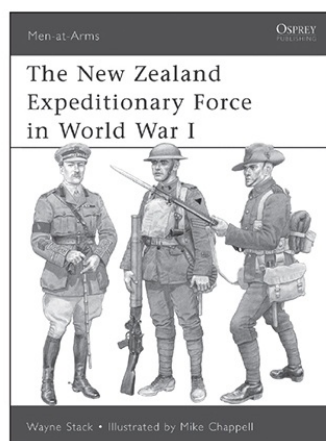
CAM No: 147 • **ISBN:** 978 1 84176 844 1



CAM No: 220 • **ISBN:** 978 184603 500 5



MAA No: 316 • **ISBN:** 978 1 85532 640 8



MAA No: 473 • **ISBN:** 978 1 84908 539 7



MAA No: 486 • **ISBN:** 978 1 78096 111 8



MAA No: 493 • **ISBN:** 978 1 78200 596 4

First published in Great Britain in 2017 by Osprey Publishing,
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

This electronic edition published in 2017 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Bloomsbury is a registered trademark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Osprey Publishing, part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

© 2017 Osprey Publishing

All rights reserved

You may not copy, distribute, transmit, reproduce or otherwise make available this publication (or any part of it) in any form, or by any means (including without limitation electronic, digital, optical, mechanical, photocopying, printing, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-4728-1710-5 (PB)
ISBN: 978-1-4728-1712-9 (eBook)
ISBN: 978-1-4728-1711-2 (ePDF)

Maps by bounford.com

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Between 2014 and 2018 our donations are being spent on their Centenary Woods project in the UK.

www.ospreypublishing.com

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.ospreypublishing.com. Here you will find our full range of publications, as well as exclusive online content, details of forthcoming events and the option to sign up for our newsletters. You can also sign up for Osprey membership, which entitles you to a discount on purchases made through the Osprey site and access to our extensive online image archive.